

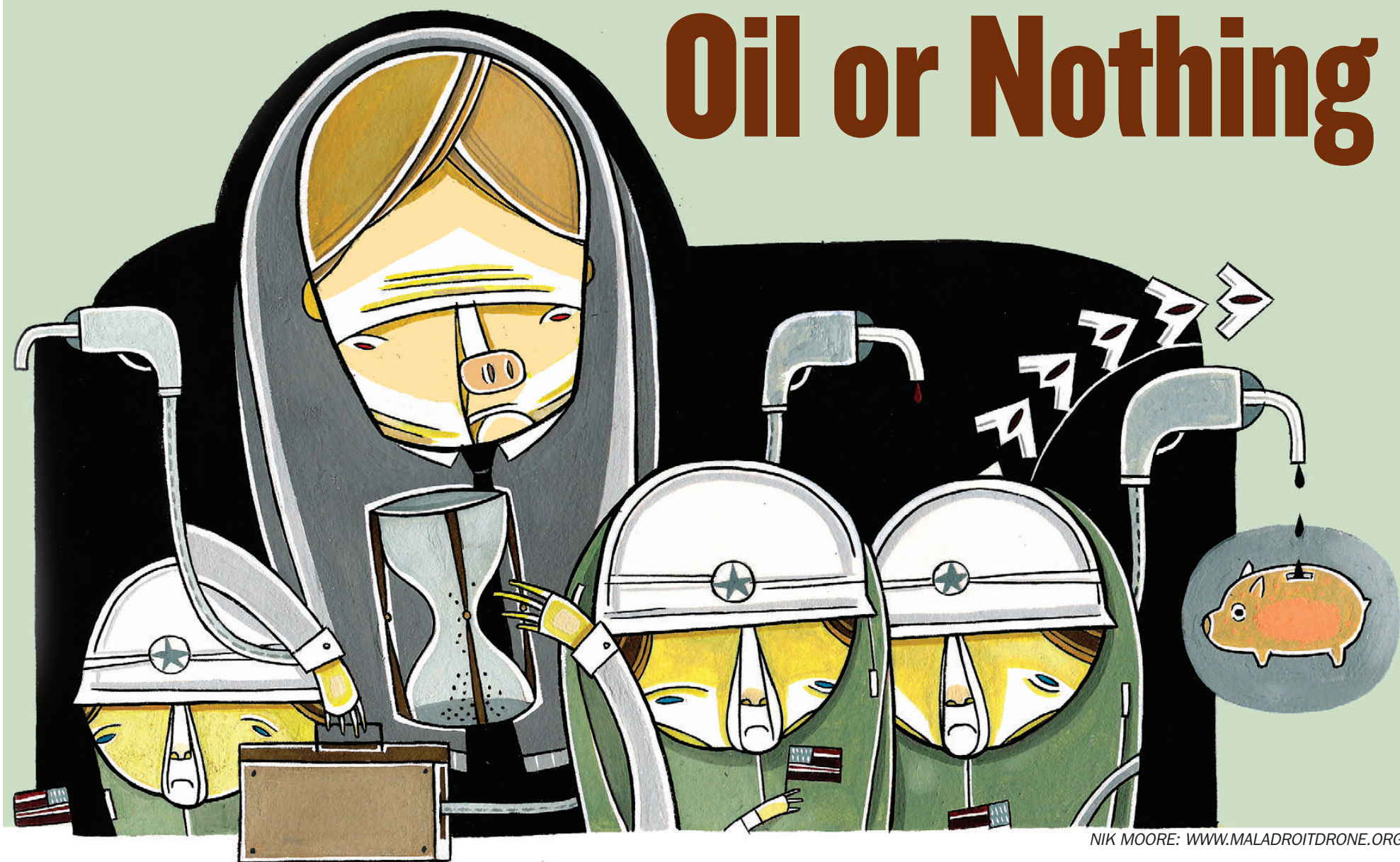
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Issue #86

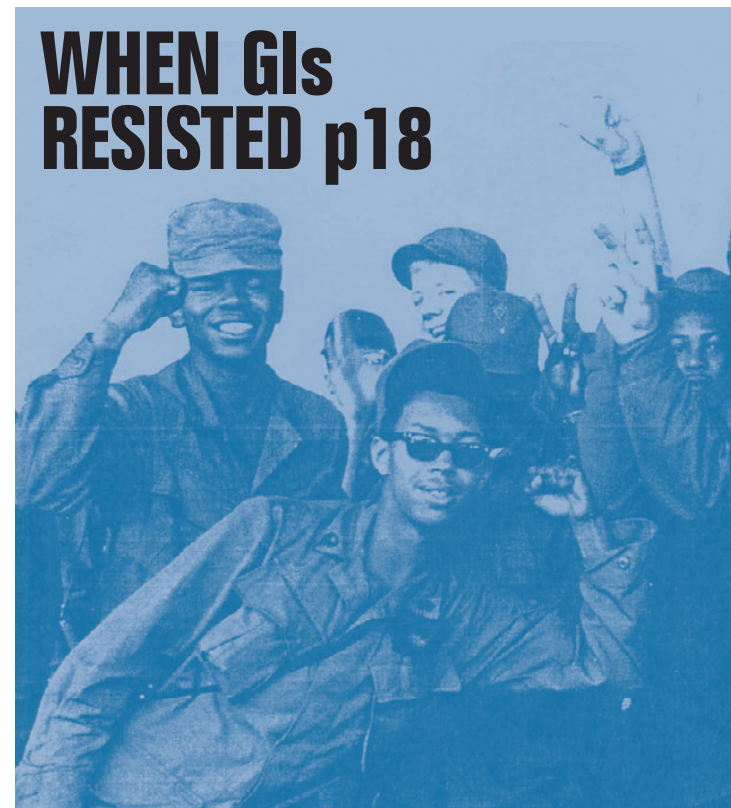
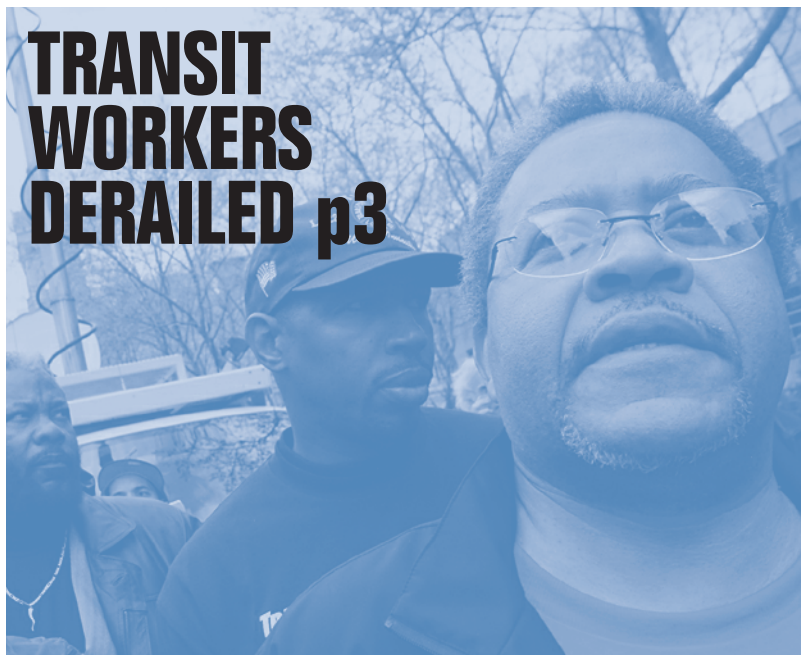
April 29 - May 10, 2006

# THE INDYPENDENT

## Oil or Nothing



WAR, ANTI-WAR, DIRTY DEMS, SOARING GAS PRICES...  
WHY THE IRAQUPATION GOES ON AND ON, AND HOW WE CAN END IT.  
**P10-11**



INDYPENDENT.ORG



## NEW YORK CITY INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

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### WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

*The Independent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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# events

## april-may

### SATURDAY, APRIL 29

6:30-10pm • \$8 - 10 sliding scale  
MAY DAY BOOKS  
VEGAN VS CARNIVORE BBQ  
Great homemade food, quality brews, and some good ol' rock n roll! Cheap drinks aplenty, All-U-Can-Eat! 14 Meadow Street in Brooklyn  
Take the L train to Grand St. Stay on Grand, cross Bushwick and walk (East) one block to Waterbury. Make a right onto Waterbury and walk 3 short blocks to Meadow St.

### SUNDAY, APRIL 30

10am - 6pm • \$5.00  
CHERRYBLOSSOMFEST  
Brooklyn Botanical Garden  
(1000 Washington Avenue)

### SUNDAY, APRIL 30 – SATURDAY, MAY 20

3 - 6pm • Sliding Scale  
SELF-DEFENSE CLASSES  
For women and transgendered people. Open to students of all abilities & skill levels.  
To Register, 718-788-1775.  
Free childcare available. 421 Fifth Ave., Bklyn. Contact: [info@cae-bklyn.org](mailto:info@cae-bklyn.org)

Sunday April 30  
2 - 6pm • FREE  
THE BLACKKAT MAYDAY PARTY  
hosted by Jason BK and Chrome.  
Line up includes: Frankie Bones & Lenny Dee, get a lesson in the history of the scratch from GrandWizzard Theodore and Johnny "Juice" Rosado, and a guest set from CX Kidtronik. Sponsored by Free NYC.  
Tompkins Square Park  
(7th St. side btw A and B)

6pm - Midnight  
CUT-A-THON  
Supercuts on St. Mark's Place is holding a cut-a-thon to benefit the Innocence Project. The best Supercuts stylists from around the city will be offering cuts for a mini-

mum donation of only \$5 from 6pm to midnight on April 30. All proceeds will benefit the Innocence Project, a legal services organization dedicated to freeing the wrongfully convicted.  
More info: 212-364-5355.  
Supercuts on 19 St. Mark's Place #23 between 2nd & 3rd Avenues  
<http://www.innocenceproject.org>

### TUESDAY, MAY 2

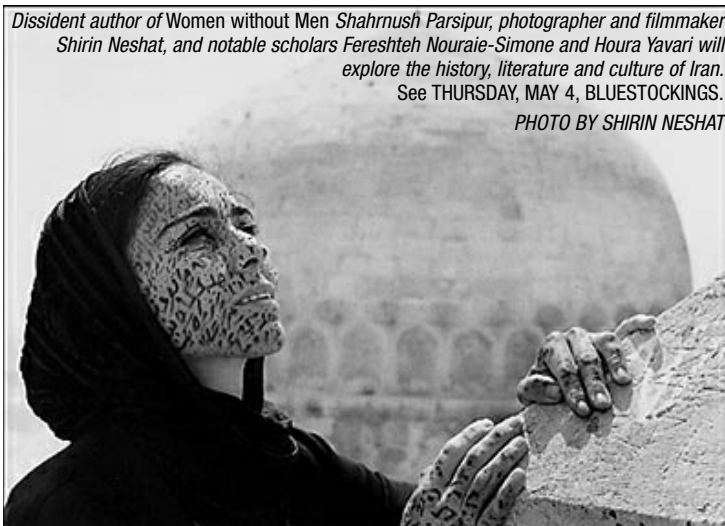
ALTERNATIVES TO THE MILITARY CAREER FAIR.  
Location TBA. Sponsor by YA-YA Network.  
Info/RSVP: 212-239-0022  
[YaYaNetNYC@aol.com](mailto:YaYaNetNYC@aol.com)

7pm • Free  
SCREENING: MICHAEL ZEWIG  
"MEETING FACE TO FACE"  
This documentary brings the voices of Iraqi working people directly into the conversation about the Occupation and what should be done.  
Blue Stockings  
172 Allen btw Stanton and Rivington

### WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

6pm • Free  
KATRINA ON THE GROUND  
Reportbacks from students and community activists who traveled to New Orleans for spring break W/Katrina on the Ground. Also an update on Katrina survivors in NYC.  
Sponsors: Women of Color Policy Network & By Any Means NYC Student Coalition (NYU, Fordham & Columbia).  
Puck Building, 295 Lafayette St, 2nd fl.  
RSVP/info: [Taja@nyu.edu](mailto:Taja@nyu.edu)

6 - 8pm  
OPEN SOFTWARE DISCUSSION  
Columbia professor Eben Moglen will discuss the importance of free software and how the public can defend it from media concentrators. Presented by the Internet Society of New York.



Dissident author of *Women without Men* Shahrnush Parsipur, photographer and filmmaker Shirin Neshat, and notable scholars Fereshteh Nouraei-Simone and Houra Yavari will explore the history, literature and culture of Iran.  
See THURSDAY, MAY 4, BLUESTOCKINGS.

PHOTO BY SHIRIN NESHA

Jefferson Market Branch Library  
6th Ave. & 9th St.

### THURSDAY, MAY 4

6pm - \$10  
ARMAGEDDON AND INDIAN POINT  
A conversation with Helen Caldicott and Jonathan Schell.  
The New School, Tishman Auditorium  
66 West 12th St.

7pm - Free  
READING: "WOMEN IN IRAN – THEN AND NOW"  
An evening of readings and conversation with four Iranian women as they discuss their works and the changing status of women in Iran.  
Blue Stockings, 172 Allen

7:30 - 10pm • Suggested donation: \$6/\$10/\$15 – No one turned away.  
BOOK PARTY WITH GREG GRANDIN, author of *The Rise of the New Imperialism and The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*.  
The Brecht Forum, 451 West St.  
Between Bank & Bethune in the W. Village

### FRIDAY, MAY 5

8pm • \$10  
MUSIC: SOUNDS OF PROTEST  
Cinco de Mayo music-politics-celebration, full rights for immigrants  
Live music & dancing, DJs, slam poets, MCs, great raffle prizes.  
Sponsor: Center for Economic Research & Social Change.  
Pollo Bravo, 116th btw 2nd & 3rd Aves.  
Info: [lwengraf@earthlink.net](mailto:lwengraf@earthlink.net)

8pm • \$12  
"CHANGE THE WORLD: AN EVENING OF THE SONG & POETRY OF BERTOLT BRECHT"  
Benefit performance for Bkn Parents for Peace. W/Sarah Safford (dancer/puppeteer), singers from Harmonic Insurgence and much more.

Old Stone House, 5th Ave, btw 3rd & 4th Sts, Park Slope, Bklyn.  
Info: [bpfp@brooklynpeace.org](mailto:bpfp@brooklynpeace.org)

### MONDAY, MAY 8

6:30 PM • FREE  
LADIES' BICYCLE REPAIR NIGHT  
Learn the basics of bicycle repair from female mechanics at our workshop designed by and for women.  
49 E. Houston St.  
(between Mott & Mulberry).

### THURSDAY MAY 11

6:30pm • FREE  
COVERING OUR BASES: A PUBLIC CONVERSATION ON YOUTH AND MILITARY RECRUITMENT  
Representatives from El Puente, New York Civil Liberties Union, Paper Tiger TV, The Dominican Women's Development Center, Uptown Youth for Peace and Justice and Peace Action New York State will speak.  
CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Ave. Rooms C201-C202  
[continuinged@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:continuinged@gc.cuny.edu)  
212-817-8215

7PM • \$5-10 Suggested  
Screening: REEL VENUS FILM FESTIVAL SHOWCASE  
Launched in 2003, this festival features women filmmakers whose work pushes traditional boundaries.  
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St.

### THURSDAY MAY 11 – MAY 16

OPERATION REFUSE WAR: A WEEK OF ACTION UNITING G.I. RESISTERS.  
[youth@warresisters.org](http://youth@warresisters.org) & <http://operationrefusewar.org>

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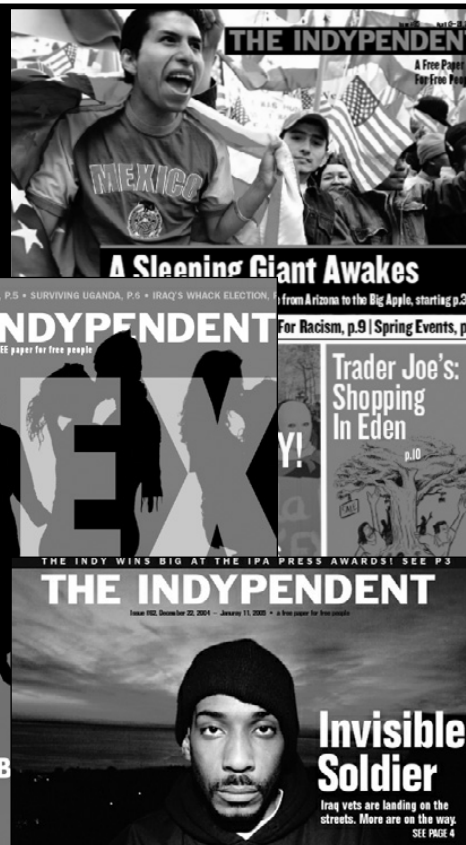
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# TWU Smackdown



**SETTING AN EXAMPLE:** TWU President Toussaint (right) marches to jail on April 24. *PHOTO: ANDREW STERN*

BY BILL VAN AUKEN

The punishing reprisals that have been carried out against New York City's 34,000 transit workers for the two-and-a-half-day strike they carried out last December express Wall Street's ferocious anger and hostility towards this act of defiance. They have also exposed the bankruptcy of the policies and political perspective of unions.

In recent weeks, a New York state court has ordered the president of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, Roger Toussaint, jailed for 10 days, fined the union \$2.5 million and indefinitely suspended dues check-off – the automatic deduction of union dues from workers' paychecks – thereby threatening to bankrupt the local.

Even before these decisions were handed down by Brooklyn State Supreme Court Justice Theodore Jones, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) had already begun implementing punitive individual fines against rank-and-file transit workers for participating in the pre-Christmas walkout. While New York State's anti-labor Taylor Law, which bars strikes by public employees, allows the docking of two days' pay for every day on the picket line, in many cases transit workers are seeing substantially more than that taken out of their paychecks.

The jailing of a prominent union official for participating in a strike overwhelmingly demanded by his members and the imposition of draconian fines aimed at crushing their union are measures that have more in common with a police state than a functioning democracy. They are an expression of the intense social polarization that exists in the United States as a whole, and particularly in New York City, the center of finance capital and home to the world's greatest concentration of multimillionaires and billionaires.

The transit strike – the first in New York in 25 years – was provoked by the MTA and both the state and city administrations with the aim of imposing drastic cutbacks to workers pensions, health care and other benefits. Their clear intention was to take on and defeat this militant section of the working class and then use it as a precedent to carry out even bigger attacks on other sections of the workforce. Behind the public officials stood the Wall Street banks and the major corporations, all of which are demanding that wages, benefits and rights won by earlier generations of workers be rolled back or eliminated as unacceptable impediments to profit and the personal accumulation of wealth by the top one percent.

Transit workers defied these demands by walking out. When the union leadership negotiated an alternative concessions agreement in the aftermath of the walkout – including open-ended increases in employee contributions to healthcare benefits – transit workers demonstrated their anger by narrowly voting down the package. Using the threat of binding arbitration to intimidate the opposition, the union organized a re-vote on the same pact, this time achieving its passage in a ballot counted April 18. The MTA, however, has dismissed the vote as an “empty gesture,” insisting that the old offer is no longer on the table.

Anger among rank-and-file transit workers is now directed at both the MTA and the union leadership, which has largely ignored protests from its members over the excessive individual fines. In court proceedings, Local 100 estimated that barely 12 percent of its members would voluntarily pay dues if the check-off were suspended. When a similar suspension was imposed during the 1980 strike, the union was brought to the brink of bank-

This proved a fatal error. The Democrats have been full partners in the attacks on transit workers. The prosecutors who went into Judge Jones's court seeking fines and jail sentences were working under the orders of state Attorney General Elliot Spitzer, who is the Democratic Party's nominee for governor in the 2006 election.

In the course of the strike, Spitzer's spokesman dismissed Republican criticism that he had failed to sufficiently condemn the walkout, declaring that the attorney general had “obtained some of the strongest measures ever imposed and we continue to seek additional penalties. Our actions speak for themselves.”

According to the New York State Board of Elections, Spitzer was the beneficiary of \$4,000 in TWU donations to both his races for attorney general and another \$3,500 so far to his gubernatorial campaign fund.

Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton tacitly backed the strikebreaking, declaring herself “neutral” in the confrontation between the

## PENALTIES LEVIED AGAINST TWU LOCAL 100

- \$2.5 million in fines for the union.
- Individual workers fined two days pay for each day of work missed. Some workers have been hit with additional fines.
- Automatic deduction of union dues from workers' paychecks indefinitely suspended.
- TWU Local 100 President Roger Toussaint jailed for 10 days.

ruptcy before the check-off was reinstated.

The transit strike exposed the inadequacy of the trade unions as means of organizing any serious social struggle as well as the venality of their leadership. The TWU's own international president branded the strike an illegal walkout and demanded that workers go back to work as scabs. As for the so-called labor movement in New York City, it did nothing to support the transit workers, organizing not even a single demonstration on their behalf.

### UNION DUES FOR DEMOCRATIC STRIKEBREAKERS

The Local 100 leadership itself had no perspective for mobilizing the strength of the working class to defeat the ferocious attacks of the state, city, the courts and the media. To the extent that it had a strategy, it was the vain hope that the Democratic politicians whom it has supported would come to the union's aid.

MTA and the TWU, while reaffirming her support for the Taylor Law.

According to the US Federal Election Committee, the transit workers' union political action committee has donated some \$11,500 to the “Friends of Hillary” campaign fund between 2002 and the beginning of this year, with the biggest donation – \$3,500 – going to Clinton last January, just weeks after workers had left the picket lines.

Thus, the union bureaucracy is funding politicians who have organized or supported strikebreaking, helped jail the union's own president and engineered the fines that are robbing workers of their pay for the “crime” of fighting to defend their rights. If it has trouble getting workers to voluntarily pay dues that are used to make such donations, it should hardly come as a surprise.

*A longer version of this article originally appeared at wsws.org. Bill van Auken is the Socialist Equality Party candidate in New York for the U.S. Senate.*

# May 1<sup>st</sup> Immigrant Strike

BY BENNETT BAUMER

Sensing growing power that immigrants carry in the United States, organizers are pushing the envelope and calling for a general strike and commercial boycott on May 1. Millions of immigrants who have toiled quietly in poor working conditions under fear of deportation took to the streets this spring to demand immigration reform. The first mega-march in Chicago on March 10 took even the organizers by surprise, and subsequent large rallies have emboldened those advocating for a general strike.

“History will be made on May 1. This will be the culmination, the apex of this incredible social movement that has developed in the past several months,” said Armando Navarro, coordinator of the National Alliance for Human Rights in Los Angeles.

The ad-hoc coalitions that have sponsored the rallies are diverse and include organizations with contradictory agendas. Organizations as different as worker centers, unions and anti-war activists mobilized their constituencies, along with Spanish-language corporate media outlets and other business groups. The groups differ on whether to participate in the May 1 general strike and commercial boycott. This latest round of protests will take place as Congress returns from a two-week recess to consider several competing immigration initiatives.

Organizers of the May 1 (International Workers' Day) actions see the recent wave of protests as the new civil rights movement, and say it draws on a broader base of support than the Chicano and other Latino movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, immigrant rights organizers say they wrestle with divisions within coalitions and anti-immigrant sentiments held by native-born whites and Blacks.

“Some take it personal when they can't get a job. I tell them to try and see the big picture, that this is a countrywide problem and that we need to find a solution,” said Carlos Montes, an organizer with Service Employees International Union Local 660 in Southern California. “People look for a scapegoat instead of looking at the real problems... The problem is not blacks or Latinos but poverty and racism.”

Montes' union local, which represents municipal employees, is backing May 1 actions, though letting members decide whether or not to strike. Many union members are barred from engaging in unauthorized strikes and most immigrants are not protected by a union contract and could be easily fired.

These concerns have lead many New York City groups to offer limited support for the May 1 actions.

“Many of the groups in New York City are not calling for an economic boycott or a strike,” said Norman Eng, community coordinator of the New York Immigration Coalition. Eng's group is urging others to participate in “human chain” events where immigrants take their lunch break to hold up signs on the sidewalk. “We are working with businesses so that they can put signs in their windows and support immigrants.”

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is strongly opposed to a general strike and boycott. The Chamber supports a senate compromise that pits undocumented immigrants against one another by offering legal status to some and deportation to others. Business influence in immigration coalitions is raising some eyebrows.

“These larger monied interests are trying to persuade us for any form of legalization and [they] use the marches for any policy, like the Senate compromise,” said Jei Fong, organizer with Chinese Staff and Workers Association.

*John Tarleton contributed to this report.*

# Soldier, Get a Lawyer!

BY URSULA LEVELT

After the Iraqi people, it is the men and women of the U.S. military that are bearing the brunt of the war. They deserve our support, but more than that, they need to know their rights, because it is possible to get out, although it is not easy.

If you signed up through the Delayed Enlistment Program, which means that you have not yet reported for active duty, you have the right to change your mind. Just send a request to separate and they cannot make you serve anymore.

Once you have reported for active duty, it is still possible to obtain a discharge within the first 180 days if you and your commanding officer both agree that you cannot or will not adjust to military life.

After 180 days, there must be adequate grounds for a discharge, such as hardship for your family, physical or mental health reasons, homosexual conduct or conscientious objection.

Many people only realize that they are opposed to participation in war after joining the military. The military defines conscientious objection as a "firm, fixed and sincere objection to war in any form or the bearing of arms" because of deeply held moral, ethical, or religious beliefs.

To meet the military's standard you must be able to answer questions like: How did you come to feel this way about war? What has influenced you? Have you seen things in your military experience that cause you to question your role in the military? You also need letters of support from your community about your sincerity and the struggles of conscience you have been going through. If you succeed in obtaining a discharge on any of these grounds, you will keep your veterans' benefits, including tuition assistance and a pension.

This is not the case if you simply fail to report for duty after a leave, in other words, go AWOL. In fact, you may be charged with a punishable offense and have to face a court martial. Once you are AWOL, it is very important to obtain assistance to try to negotiate a deal that lets you separate "in lieu of court martial." There is help out there. Make sure you come and get it.

*This column provides general information, NOT specific legal advice. Each case is different. For more information: GI Rights Hotline: 1-800-FYI-95GI or 1-800-394-9544, [www.girights.org](http://www.girights.org); Center on Conscience and War: 1-202-483-2220, [www.centeronconscience.org](http://www.centeronconscience.org). Also visit the Military Law Task Force page at the National Lawyers' Guild website – [www.nlg.org/mltf](http://www.nlg.org/mltf).*



## Military Resistance



# Java & GI Joe

## A NEW COFFEEHOUSE MOVEMENT?

BY TOD ENSIGN

One of the greatest achievements of the Vietnam antiwar movement was its creation of a GI coffeehouse and counseling network. The first coffeehouse was opened outside Ft. Jackson, S.C., in late 1967, two-and-a-half years after American troops invaded Vietnam. Within weeks, hundreds of GIs had visited during their off-duty hours.

the Vietnam era. Foremost here is the transformation of a conscript-driven military to one that is entirely composed of "volunteers." This has made the armed forces much less representative of American society as a whole.

One of the primary reasons why advocates of an "all-volunteer" military wanted to junk the draft was their belief that it fueled much of the antiwar opposition – especially among young people. When one compares the size

>> One of the primary reasons why advocates of an "all-volunteer" military wanted to junk the draft was their belief that it fueled much of the antiwar opposition – especially among young people.

Over the next year, similar projects sprang up outside 20 other major U.S. bases.

These projects embodied the "counter-cultural" spirit of the times. Sex, psychedelic drugs, and rock and roll coexisted with a strong antiwar message. Civilian activists, mostly recruited from the antiwar movement, worked in tandem with active-duty GIs, some of whom had just returned from Vietnam. At some projects, the soldiers played a leading role in setting political goals, providing counseling and putting out the antiwar newspaper that was a staple of every coffeehouse project.

Today, antiwar organizers are again discussing how active-duty GIs can be recruited to play a more active part in the struggle against the war. A Le Moyne College/Zogby International survey of soldiers fighting in Iraq, released in February, found that 72 percent of them wanted to be withdrawn within a year, while 29 percent favored immediate withdrawal.

Organizers from Citizen Soldier, a GI/veterans rights advocacy group, recently met with antiwar veterans and GIs in Fayetteville, N.C., home to Ft. Bragg, where 40,000 combat troops are stationed. They discussed the prospects for establishing a coffeehouse and counseling project near the base – the largest in the Eastern United States. Their hope is that a successful pilot project at Bragg could stimulate the creation of similar efforts at other key posts.

Both the U.S. military and American society have experienced enormous change since

and intensity of today's movement against the war in Iraq with that of the Vietnam War, this analysis appears to be accurate.

The transition to a volunteer force has had two other significant consequences. One, women were integrated into most military jobs, except for the infantry and armor. Today, every sixth soldier is female, except in the Marine Corps. Second, the shrinkage of active-duty force levels, which became necessary once competitive wages were being paid, has meant that reservists and Guard troops must shoulder a much greater combat burden when the military deploys into combat. Today, one out of three GIs serving in Iraq is a reservist. These soldiers are older, have family obligations and are less accustomed to the rigors of military life.

These demographic changes are central to any discussion of how a coffeehouse project could attract the participation of GIs today. During Vietnam, the average low-ranking soldier was paid less than \$300 a month. They lived in austere barracks and ate their meals in dingy chowhalls. These conditions made an off-base coffeehouse seem attractive as an off-duty refuge from the tedium of the "green machine" and its grinding routines.

Today, half of all soldiers are married and many have children. Their relatively good pay and benefits allow them to buy expensive cars and vans and many choose Applebee's and Mickey D's over the chowhall.

To counter serious problems with recruitment and retention, the Pentagon now offers a series of robust bonuses that range from

\$10,000 to \$40,000, payable over the life of an enlistment hitch. Elite "Delta Force" troops can get up to \$100,000 if they'll sign for another tour. (A note to those who believe that recruiting shortfalls may force a reinstitution of the draft: The Pentagon has shown that it will spend whatever it takes to induce (bribe?) low-income youth to fill its combat slots.

One of the main attractions of the Vietnam-era coffeehouses was that GIs identified them with the "counter-cultural" changes that were sweeping America at the time. Psychedelic paraphernalia and drugs fanned the latent anti-authoritarianism of soldiers. This, in turn, sparked challenges to all forms of authority – sexual mores, gender roles, social conventions and the military's vaunted chain of command. One key demand of the American Servicemen's (sic) Union was "an end to sir-ing and saluting." Explicit anti-war organizing, while important, was only one item on the projects' agendas.

Popular culture today is much more diffuse, blending many different strands: rap, punk, heavy metal, goth, hippy, traditional rock-and-roll, and country-western. In lifestyle, openly gay couples (not on a military base, however!) co-exist with super-straight engaged couples who flaunt their pre-marital chastity.

Organizers concluded that a coffeehouse/counseling project could succeed in attracting significant numbers of soldiers assuming that it provided internet access, good java, and plenty of free parking. Many young soldiers today quest for intellectual, cultural and political fulfillment, as they always have. A coffeehouse that combines an alternative bookstore with a lively mix of free musical performances, stand-up comedy and poetry (with some political speechifying thrown in) could become highly popular with many GIs.

A number of important questions remain. Who will finance the cost of one, not to mention a dozen such coffeehouse projects today? Certainly GIs can be expected to provide more than a small portion of the budget. During Vietnam, the United Servicemen's (sic) Support Fund (ISSF), raised substantial sums, which it then parceled out to the local projects to help them pay rent and staff salaries. Nothing like the USSF exists today, but something along these lines will be needed if these projects are to thrive. Important first steps have been taken, but much more needs to be done.

See *Citizen Soldier* for more information, [www.citizen-soldier.org](http://www.citizen-soldier.org).

*Todd Ensign is the director of Citizen Soldier, a GI/veterans rights advocacy group, and author of America's Military Today.*

## MORE G.I. RESISTANCE

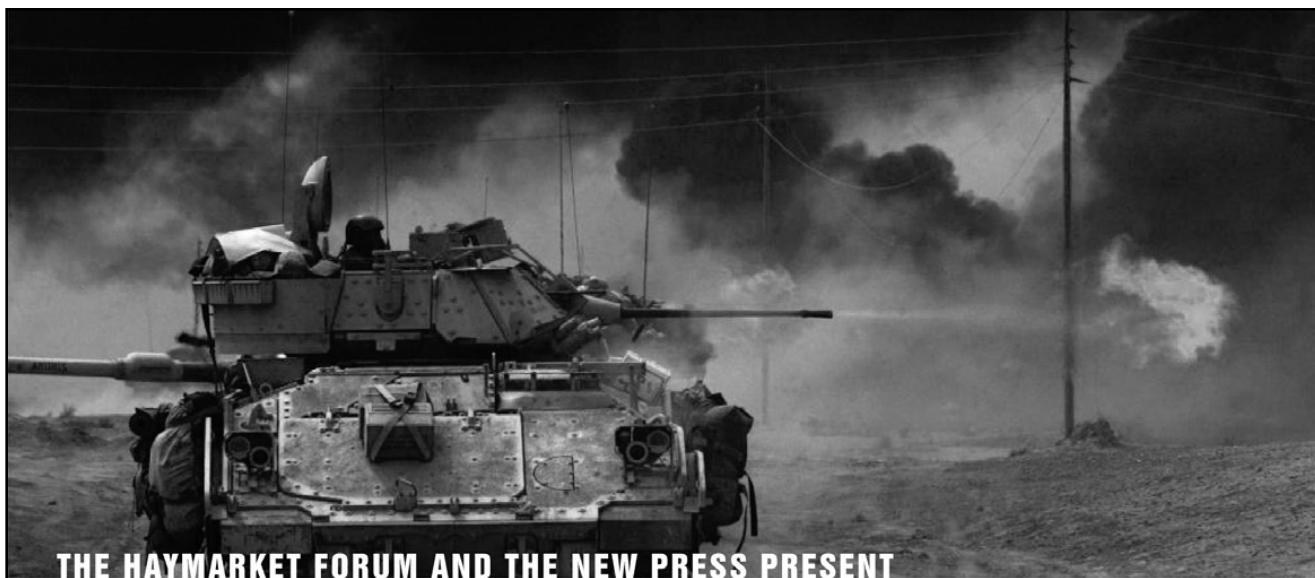
**Iraq Veterans Against the War**  
[ivaw.net](http://ivaw.net)

**Traveling Soldier**  
[traveling-soldier.org](http://traveling-soldier.org)

**Courage to Resist: Supporting the Troops That Refuse to Fight**  
[Couragetoresist.org](http://Couragetoresist.org)

**Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors**  
[objector.org](http://objector.org)

**War Resisters Inside the Military**  
[tomjoard.org/WarHeroes.htm](http://tomjoard.org/WarHeroes.htm)



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Nearly forty years ago, historian, activist, and best-selling author Howard Zinn, whose foreword and afterword frame Arnove's book, published *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, which argued with remarkable foresight that getting out of Vietnam was the only realistic option. *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal* will likely prove equally prescient.

Both authors will be present for a book signing after the discussion.

**Anthony Arnove** is the editor of *Iraq Under Siege* and co-editor, with Howard Zinn, of *Voices of a People's History of the United States*. His writing has appeared in the *Financial Times*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *Monthly Review*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Z Magazine*, and other publications.

**Deepa Fernandes** is co-host of WBAI's morning show, *Wakeup Call*. Her new book is titled, *Targeted: National Security and the Business of Immigration*.

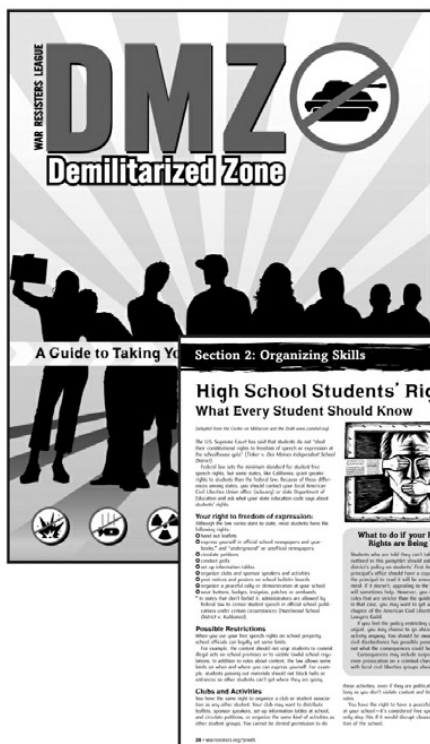
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**Kristian Williams**

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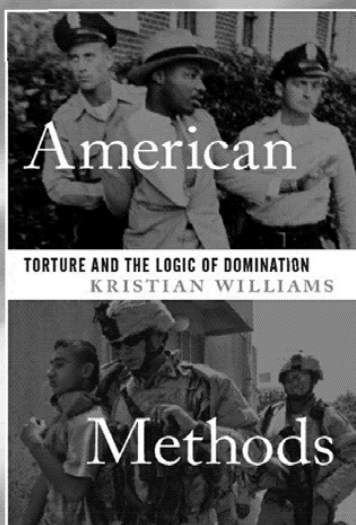
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# Hubris and Neglect

THE IMMINENT DECLINE  
OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE?

BY RAMZY BAROUD

The miscalculated policies of the U.S. administration in the Middle East are quickly depleting the country's ability to sustain its once unchallenged global position. Winds of change are blowing everywhere, and there is little that Washington's ideologues can do to stop it.

The above claim is increasingly finding its way into the realm of mainstream thinking, despite all attempts to mute or relegate its import. A recent speech by U.S. Republican Congressman and Chairman of the House of International Relations Committee, Henry Hyde was the focal point of analysis by Martin Jacques in *The Guardian*.

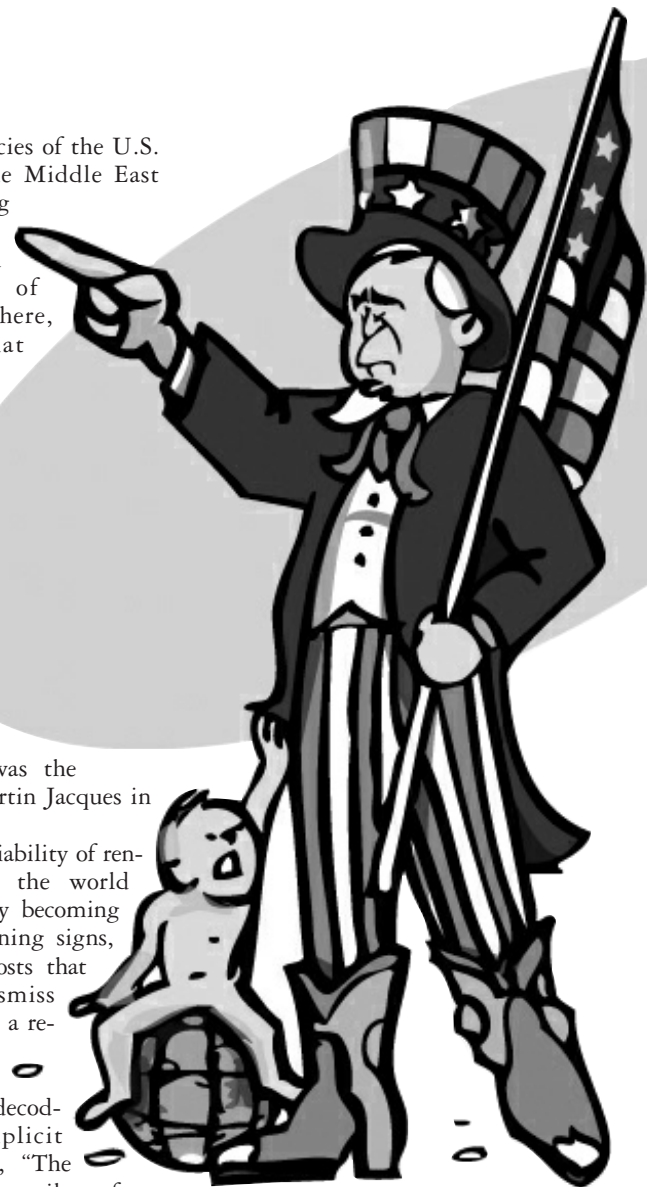
"Our power has the grave liability of rendering our theories about the world immune from failure. But by becoming deaf to easily discerned warning signs, we may ignore long-term costs that result from our actions and dismiss reverses that should lead to a re-examination of our goals and means," Hyde said.

In his poignant analysis – decoding Hyde's deliberately implicit thoughts – Jacques argued, "The Bush administration stands guilty of an extraordinary act of imperial overreach which has left the U.S. more internationally isolated than ever before, seriously stretched financially and guilty of neglect in east Asia and elsewhere."

Ironically, the invasion of Iraq with its "thousands of tactical" mistakes – as recently admitted by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice – was meant to solidify and ensure the U.S.' post-Cold-War global dominance. According to Jacques, as inferred from Hyde's notable speech, "It may well prove to be a harbinger of its decline." It can also be argued that U.S. adventurism in Iraq has provided other countries the coveted opportunity to further their national and regional interests without constant fear of U.S. reprisals.

While there are indications that Washington is finally waking up to this grim reality, which it has helped create, there are no signs whatsoever that a fundamental change of course in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is taking place: The destructive war in Iraq rages on; the self-inflicting damage of unconditionally backing Israel in its endless colonial ambitions perpetuates; and the same detrimental policy line used with Iraq is employed, almost identically, with Iran.

The world is changing, yet the U.S. government refuses to abandon its old ways: militaristic, self-defeating and overbearing. Indeed, the U.S. must remold not only its policies in the Middle East, but also its hegemonic policies throughout the world. For once, the U.S. administration needs to tap into its sense of reason, and discern the



GARY MARTIN

>> The world is  
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self-defeating and  
overbearing.

"warning signs" that should lead to "the re-examination of [its] goals and means." A first step is to bring the troops home, and with them the entire doctrine that unrestrained violence and perpetual wars can further the cause of an already distrusted superpower.

Ramzy Baroud is author of *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle*. A longer version of this article originally appeared at [palestinechronicle.com](http://palestinechronicle.com).

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## Iranian Workers Rock Regime

BY JACK RAY

Iran's recent declaration that it has successfully enriched uranium is bound to further increase tensions between Tehran and the United States. But the Iranian government also has an internal crisis on its hands. The country's high level of poverty has triggered a series of intense social struggles.

The German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported that increasing dissatisfaction about economic conditions in Iran is placing additional pressure on the regime in Tehran. Despite a ban on strikes in the country, the number of workers protesting poor conditions is increasing.

Angered by unpaid salaries and generally low wages, workers in the northern Iranian provincial capital Rasht blocked streets and protested in front of government offices a fortnight ago brandishing banners that read: "We are hungry!" It wasn't the first time that thousands of employees at the country's largest state-owned textile factory had laid down their tools. But this time they were joined by dam workers in the western province of Elam and employees of a pharmaceutical factory in Tehran. Recently, workers have also gone on strike against harsh work conditions and impending layoffs in mines and petrochemical plants across the country, with hundreds of coal miners from the northern province of Gilan protesting the fact that they have not been paid for 13 months. Workers were also on strike in the car factories of the Iran-Khodro company, already the site of a massive work stoppage on last year's Day of Social Welfare and Securities (July 16), when strikers demanded the introduction of a minimum wage.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promised an improvement in living stan-


dards and income when he took office in August 2005, but the country's economic difficulties persist despite annual oil revenues of about \$50 billion. Even though the government has introduced various measures to combat inflation and mass unemployment – in addition to initiating projects designed to combat homelessness – more than 50 percent of the Iranian population continues to live under the poverty line, according to official estimates provided by the Iranian Central Bank. The government institution sets the poverty line at an income of \$280 per month for a family of five.

The current strike wave was initiated by Tehran bus drivers in January, and it immediately provoked a harsh response from the government. Several hundred bus drivers were arrested within a few hours of the beginning of the strike. The strike's leaders – Mansur Hayat Gheibi and Mansoor Ossanolou – have been held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison for violating the national ban on unions by creating the "Wahed" organization of bus drivers. Hayat Gheibi was released on April 16 after going on a hunger strike, but Ossanolou remains jailed.

While Iran-related statements by Western politicians have largely focused on Iran's nuclear weapons program, some commentators are beginning to draw attention to the country's internal conflicts. "Iran's new government boasts of representing the interests of working men and women. But their violent crackdown on the bus workers' union make these words ring hollow," Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch, said earlier this year.

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# World briefs

## U.S. SETS NEW RECORD

U.S. greenhouse gas emissions set a new record in 2004, increasing by the equivalent of 110 million tons of carbon dioxide, *The Independent* (UK) reports.

## 2006 OFF TO A HOT START

2006 has continued the trend of rising global temperatures, with the period of January to March registering as the 7th warmest on record. Worldwide land and ocean temperatures averaged almost one degree Fahrenheit higher than the 20th century mean, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The rising global temperatures in 2006 follow unprecedented warming throughout 2005, which was the second warmest year on record. According to the NOAA, temperatures have been rising rapidly over the past three decades.



## ZAPATISTAS WARN GOVERNMENT OVER CONSTRUCTION OF DAM

The three-year struggle by indigenous farmers opposed to the building of a hydroelectric dam that would supply water to Mexico's tourist hub Acapulco has been joined by Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos. He warned on April 16 that any attack on communities resisting the dam's construction would be considered an act of aggression against the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. The \$1 billion investment project would flood 42,000 acres of land, displacing 25,000 indigenous farmers while causing irreversible harm to the ecosystem on which the farmers depend.

For more, see [narconews.com](http://narconews.com).

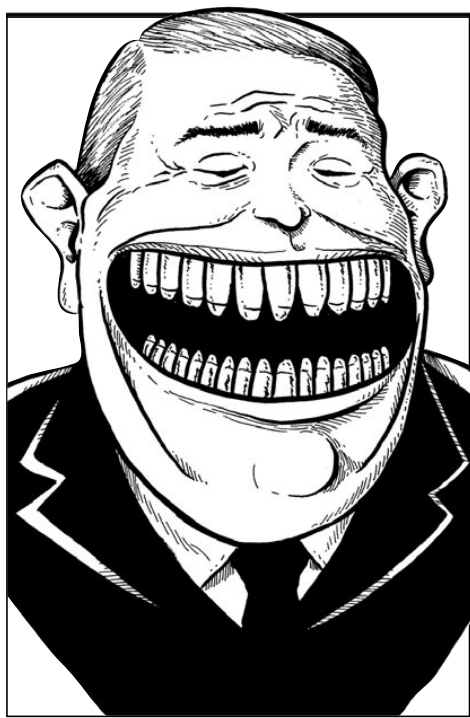
## NIGERIAN OIL TENSION INCREASES

On April 19, the militant Nigerian group Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) detonated a car bomb in the city of Port Harcourt, killing two. MEND's actions, coupled with the rising price of crude oil, has served to draw international attention to Nigeria, which in 2005 produced 2.4 million barrels of oil per day and is currently the U.S.'s fifth-largest supplier of oil. MEND has focused mainly on attacking properties owned by Royal Dutch/Shell Group. The oil giant has repeatedly ignored the implementation of environmental standards, leaving residents of poor villages without potable water, arable land or clean fish to eat. MEND's actions have also tapped into rising discontent with the government among the poor of Nigeria,

who have seen little benefit from oil profits.

## HAITIAN PREZ FACES SPLIT PARLIAMENT

As of April 24, Haitian President-elect René Preval's Lespwa political movement had captured 11 of the Senate's 30 seats in national Parliamentary elections, with returns for six seats still out. Preval's party had also secured at least 20 seats in the lower Chamber of Deputies, with returns from a few dozen seats still out. Preval, a protégé of former President Aristide, will need to form a coalition government regardless of the returns, as his party did not field enough candidates to secure a governing majority in Parliament. Preval is set to be sworn in May 14. Haiti has been ruled by foreign troops and an unelected interim government since Aristide was ousted in 2004 in a U.S.-backed coup.



FRANK REYNOSO

BY NORMAN SOLOMON

One of the nation's leading pollsters, Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center, wrote recently that among Americans "there is little potential support for the use of force against Iran." This month the White House has continued to emphasize that it is committed to seeking a diplomatic solution. Yet the U.S. government is very likely to launch a military attack on Iran within the next year. How can that be? In the runup to war, appearances are often deceiving. Official events may seem to be moving in one direction while policymakers are actually headed in another. On their own timetable, White House strategists implement a siege of public opinion that relies on escalating media spin. One administration after another has gone through the motions of staying on a diplomatic track while laying down flagstones on a path to war.

Several days ago President Bush said that "the doctrine of prevention is to work together to prevent the Iranians from having a nuclear weapon" — and he quickly added that "in this case, it means diplomacy." On April 12 the secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, urged the U.N. Security Council to take "strong steps" in response to Iran's announcement of progress toward enriching uranium. Bush and Rice were engaged in a timeworn ritual that involves playacting diplomacy before taking military action.

# Playacting Diplomacy Again on Road to War

Seven years ago, President Clinton proclaimed that a U.S.-led NATO air war on Yugoslavia was starting because all peaceful avenues for dealing with the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, had reached dead ends. The Clinton administration and the major U.S. media outlets failed to mention that Washington had handed Milosevic a poison-pill ultimatum in the fine print of the proposed Rambouillet accords — with Appendix B stipulating that NATO troops would have nearly unlimited run of the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

## DIPLOMACY CAN BE DECEIVING

Recent decades of American history are filled with such faux statesmanship greasing the media wheels and political machinery for military interventions in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Central America and the Middle East. But the current administration's eagerness to use "diplomacy" as a prop for going to war has been unusually brazen.

On Jan. 31, 2003 — five days before the balmy speech by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell to the U.N. Security Council — the president held a private Oval Office meeting with Tony Blair. Summing up the discussion, the British prime minister's chief foreign policy adviser David Manning noted in a memo: "Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning." Meanwhile, President Bush and his top aides were still telling the public that they were pursuing all diplomatic channels in hopes of preventing war.

Pundits have often advised presidents to use diplomatic maneuvers as virtual shams in order to legitimize the coming warfare. Charles Krauthammer blew his stack in mid-November 1998 when U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan seemed to make progress in averting a U.S. missile strike against Iraq. "It is perfectly fine for an American president to mouth the usual pieties about international consensus and some such," Krauthammer wrote in *Time*

magazine. "But when he starts believing them, he turns the Oval Office over to Kofi Annan and friends."

In late summer 2002, with momentum quickening toward an Iraq invasion, *Newsweek* foreign affairs columnist Fareed Zakaria urged the Bush administration to recognize the public-relations value of allowing U.N. weapons inspectors to spend some time in Iraq.

"Even if the inspections do not produce the perfect crisis," he wrote optimistically, "Washington will still be better off for having tried because it would be seen to have made every effort to avoid war."

When reality can't hold a candle to perception, then reality is apt to become imperceptible. And in matters of war and peace, when powerful policy wonks in Washington effectively strive for appearances to be deceiving, the result is a pantomime of diplomacy that's scarcely like the real thing. When the actual goal is war, the PR task is to make a show of leaving no diplomatic stone unturned.

That kind of macabre ritual was underway on April 10 when former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan told reporters: "The president has made it very clear that we're working with the international community to find a diplomatic solution when it comes to the Iranian regime and its pursuit of nuclear weapons."

The quote appeared the next morning in a *New York Times* news article under a headline that must have pleased the war planners at the White House: "Bush Insists on Diplomacy in Confronting a Nuclear Iran."

Ambrose Bierce defined diplomacy as "the patriotic act of lying for one's country." But there is nothing less patriotic than lying to one's country, especially when the result is a war that could have been avoided if honesty had substituted for mendacity.

Norman Solomon's latest book is *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. For information, go to: [www.WarMadeEasy.com](http://www.WarMadeEasy.com).

## DISPATCH FROM GAZA

# THE EARTH IS CLOSING IN ON US

BY LAILA EL-HADDAD

The shells keep falling. They've gotten inside my head, so that it's not just my house shaking but but my brain throbbing. It's like someone is banging a gong next to my ear every few minutes, sometimes five times a minute, like last night. And just when I savor a few moments of silence, it starts again as if to say, "You're not going to get away that easily."

We went to sleep to the rattling of our windows and invasive pounding and after-echo of the shells. We sleep as they fall.

We pray fajir, and they fall again. We wake, and they are still falling.

When they are closer, when they fall in Shija'iyah east of Gaza City, they make my stomach drop.

And I want to hide, but I don't know where.

The Earth is closing in on us.

That's the thing about occupation — it invades even your most private of spaces. And while the shells were falling inside my head, they also killed little Hadil Ghabin today.

A shell landed on her home in Beit Lahiya, shattering her helpless body and injuring five members of her family, including Hadil's pregnant mother, Safia, and her 19-year-old sister.

My headaches seem inconsequential when I think of little Hadil. Sometimes people here say they prefer death to this existence; you'll frequently hear at funerals: "Irta'at"... she's more comfortable now anyhow — what was there to live for here?

The Earth is squeezing us. I wish we were its wheat so we could die and live again.

That has become our sad reality. Death provides relief.

Sometimes it feels like we are all in some collective torture room; who is playing God with us this night, I wonder? When I look up into the sky, and hear the shells, or see the faceless helicopter gunships cruising intently through the moonlit sky, I wonder, do they see me?

And when the shells start falling again, I can't help but imagine some beside-himself-with-boredom 18 year old on the border, lighting a cig or texting his girlfriend back in Tel Aviv, "Just a few more rounds to go hon... give it another whirl, Ron, its been two minutes already."

Sometimes, when I'm on edge, I might just yell out and wave my arms at them. Do they hear me?

We decided to escape this evening to my father's farm in central Gaza, where we roasted potatoes and warmed tea on a small mangal, as we listened to thikr about the Prophet on the occasion of his mawlid from a nearby mosque, under the ominous roars of fighter jets, patrolling the otherwise lonely skies above.

"Where are you heading off to?" asked Osama, the shopkeeper downstairs.

"Off to the farm. We're suffocating," I replied, Yousuf tugging at my arm ... "Mama... Yallah! Yallah!"

"Wallah Laila, we're not just suffocating...we're asphyxiating. I feel I can't breathe anymore. And my head is pounding and pounding. All I hear is BOOM BOOM now."

The Earth is closing in on us.

And little Hadil is dead.

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**Sponsoring organizations include:** War Resisters League, War Resisters International American Friends Service Committee Youth and Militarism Program & the NY Regional Office, the Center on Conscience & War, the Washington Peace Center, the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition, Iraq Veterans Against the War - NYC Chapter, Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild, Fellowship of Reconciliation: Disarmament Program, Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCCO), Student Peace Action Network (SPAN), and Veterans for Peace (List in formation)

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Connecting Resistance within the Coalition of the Willing

All Wars or This War? Conscientious Objection as a Political or Moral Choice

Building Bridges with Military Families

**Other Events include:** Lobby Day on Capitol Hill for CO Recognition (organized by the Center on Conscience & War), Eyes Wide Open Exhibit on the Mall, GI Rights Hotline Gathering, Silent March Against the War in Iraq and a number of other events.

The focus of the events is on supporting contemporary American conscientious objectors and their families, as well as examining the current potential of conscientious objection (in its various forms) as a strategy for building an anti-war movement. In addition, Operation Refuse War will bring together international and American conscientious objectors to share their experiences and ideas.

For a full conference schedule and to register please visit: [operationrefusewar.org](http://operationrefusewar.org)

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COMMENTARY

# Playing It Safe

## THE RISKIEST COURSE FOR THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

BY A.K. GUPTA

More than half of the U.S. public now says the Iraq war was a mistake, but almost all members of Congress support funding the war. The question for the antiwar movement is: Can it make politicians pay a price for supporting the war and thereby force its end?

The antiwar movement brings together three main elements. The first is counter-recruitment, which denies bodies to the military and hampers its ability to fight the war. (The Pentagon claims it's meeting its goals, but it has reduced recruiting quotas and relaxed standards so far that many new recruits have criminal records or a history of violence or substance abuse or score at the bottom of aptitude tests.)

The second antiwar force is within the military itself. More than 70 percent of U.S. troops in Iraq want to see the war ended within a year. A number of antiwar military groups have sprung up, such as Iraq Veterans Against the War and Military Families Speak Out. With repeated deployments, the military itself is breaking down, with high rates of divorce and psychological disorders and the exodus of many junior-level officers.

The third element comprises traditional peace and social justice groups, many of which are part of United for Peace and Justice (UPJ). It plays a vital role by staging the big marches

that give the antiwar movement media visibility, reaching out to mainstream groups and helping to sustain the ongoing work of its member organizations. Its tactics include marches, vigils, leafleting, teach-ins, petitioning, lobbying, etc.

But the antiwar movement hasn't been more successful because more radical elements are missing, particularly those at the heart of the anti-globalization movement. The success of the anti-globalization movement was based on tying single-issue groups together under a simple, compelling idea — opposition to corporate globalization and the rule of the market — with identifiable targets, the WTO and IMF, and using tactics that made the institutions pay a price for continuing with their course of action — by attempting to shut them down.

Meanwhile, the antiwar movement has been unable (beyond sloganeering) to tie the war to domestic issues, such as domestic spying and repression of civil liberties, the targeting of immigrants under the "war on terror," neo-liberal economic policies, the destruction of New Orleans, oil industry profits and energy policy.

While direct action activists and anarchists have failed certainly to create a radical wing of the antiwar movement, UPJ has not provided that space either. UPJ has been successful at making room for legal, mainstream protests, but taking a purely legal approach against an illegal war and an illegal government is bound to fail.

The protest tactics rely on either numbers or moral suasion, while the electoral tactics — distributing voter guides, asking voters to sign a "pledge" not to vote for pro-war candidates and "bird-dogging" candidates — require significant resources and people power, which UPJ lacks. To its credit, UPJ has suggested one tactic that could be successful: pressuring candidates themselves to sign a pledge opposing the war, and thereby forcing them to take a public stance.

UPJ lacks labor power because it's failed to inspire the most committed and creative activists, and it lacks resources because it's become dependent on funding from liberals who are not interested in real change and think letting Bush twist in the wind is a strategy.

### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

One glaring failure is that after three years of war and at least a dozen major marches, there has not been one attempt to organize a Seattle-style action to nonviolently shut down the "war machine" in Washington, D.C., during the workweek.

Another tactic would be to revive the "Pledge of Resistance" of the Central American solidarity struggles, that is, asking individuals to pledge to commit civil disobedience if the U.S. tried to widen the war. UPJ could pour more resources into counter-recruitment, too. The organization does not have anyone working full-time on counter-recruitment despite its effectiveness in reducing recruitment lev-

els. One successful but underutilized tactic is student walkouts.

UPJ is also hobbled by its lumbering, reactive style. The Bush administration has been threatening to attack Iran for more than a year, but UPJ's first public statement opposing a new war was only issued this April.

And it needs to be forthright about its failure to do any real organizing around the Palestinian struggle, which has alienated many activists. UPJ lists all sorts of activities undertaken in support of Palestinians, but apart from organizing one day of action against Israel's Apartheid Wall in November 2003, every "activity" is a statement, a call or a resolution.

There is the risk that UPJ will repeat the mistake it made in 2004 of shifting from antiwar work to electoral politics. Leading up to the congressional elections this fall, it's been courting groups like organized labor, the National Organization for Women and Jesse Jackson's RainbowPUSH Coalition. While they may help boost turnout at a march, these groups are too wedded to the Democrats to hold them accountable for their support of the war.

The reality is that even as the war has become overwhelmingly unpopular, many of the most committed activists have shifted away from antiwar organizing — mainly into local organizing, New Orleans reconstruction and immigrant rights.

Ending the war means creating space for both radical and liberal groups and tactics; otherwise we're doomed to march in circles for years.



IRAQ: An April 2004 funeral procession in Sadr City for a Shi'ite militiaman killed by U.S. forces. PHOTO: ANDREW STERN



NO MORE CLOWNING AROUND: To date, the antiwar movement has been unable to shake the bipartisan consensus for a continued war in Iraq. PHOTO: ERIC M. APPLETON / DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

# UP THE WRONG TREE?

## Dems are not the answer

BY A.K. GUPTA

With President Bush's poll numbers plumbng new lows and two-thirds of Americans having soured on the Iraq War, all the talk is of withdrawal. But that's all it is: talk.

By constantly intoning "withdrawal," the Bush administration has lulled many Americans into thinking that the war is winding down. Yet work continues feverishly on the largest U.S. Embassy in the world in the heart of Baghdad, permanent bases are rising all over Iraq, 130,000 U.S. troops remain hunkered down, and the casualty rate has spiked upward once again.

The big question is how to end the Iraq occupation completely and swiftly. For every day that U.S. forces remain, there is a greater chance that the U.S. will widen the war by striking Iran or Syria or some other country.

Wars are like the weather: they don't respect borders. This war has already spread by car and suicide bomb throughout the Middle East and even into Europe. Bombing Iran will multiply these attacks.

But in the cynical calculus of the White House, attacking Iran, particularly with tactical nuclear weapons, has its benefits. Using nukes would remove the taboo against their use while putting the whole world on notice that the United States is willing to use terror and genocide to enforce its rule.

Any resulting attack on Americans would be used to justify further domestic repression, such as a formal suspension of the Constitution. Decades ago, Hannah Arendt noted that empire abroad means tyranny at home. Thus, the spying, roundups, terror trials, indefinite detention of citizens and the war on immigrants are the logical domestic extensions of the "war on terror."

That's why ending the war abroad also requires a strategy for ending it at home.

The right effectively beats down any debate, however. If you question the tactics, you give aid and comfort to the enemy; you are weak on terror. There are no easy answers, but not standing up for our convictions and our rights means we forfeit them anyway.

### PRO-WAR DEMOCRATS

As much as they protest, the Democrats have provided important cover for the Bush administration. One need only look at the brewing war against Iran. The same lies, the same doomsday pronouncements that were deployed against Iraq are being used again, yet the Democrats either remain silent or join in the bomb-Iran chorus.

Even though the Iraq war is three years

old and the campaign against Iran has been under way for a similar period, the antiwar movement has no clear idea of how to end the current war and prevent the next one. Any successful movement has to force concessions and gain victories from the formal political structure.

Hany Khalil of United for Peace and Justice (UPJ), the dominant antiwar coalition, states, "For this war to come to an end Congress has to cut off funding.... The Vietnam War ended after Congress cut off funds."

The big difference, however, is that the United States had almost completely withdrawn from Vietnam before Congress cut off funding to the government of South Vietnam.

Would the Democrats cut off funding to the Iraq War with troops still in the country?

Unlikely. The base of the Democratic Party is overwhelmingly antiwar, but Democrats in Congress continue to support the war by lopsided margins. On March 16, a majority of Democrats in the House joined in a 348-71 vote in favor of a \$92 billion "emergency" spending bill, mainly to fund the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Now the fact that 71 House members opposed the bill is an improvement over previous years, but there is a long way to go. The problem is, the more ambitious the politician, the more s/he is pro-war. John Kerry ran to the right of Bush in 2004 — he wanted to send more troops to Iraq. Positioning herself for 2008, Hillary Clinton is for more war in Iraq and a new one against Iran.

If the Democrats have a position, it's the Murtha plan, supported both by the House leadership and the Progressive Caucus. It's just a plan to save empire, however. Like a spoiled rich kid with the keys to Daddy's sports car, Bush is trashing the U.S. military in his Middle East joyride.

For their part, the Democrats have never met a war they didn't like. They want to withdraw troops so they can be "rested, re-equipped and redeployed" to focus on the "war on terror." In other words, so they can fight wars in other countries.

The Democrats are afraid of their antiwar base. It's why leaders in the party forced out Paul Hackett, an antiwar Iraq veteran who was waging an energetic and highly popular campaign in Ohio for a U.S. Senate seat. It's why the Democrats have reined in MoveOn, which has largely shunned the antiwar movement and can only bring itself to say "Don't Nuke Iran," rather than oppose an attack in general.

Relying on the Democrats to end the war is like asking a crack addict to turn in his dealer. The task of ending the war falls to an antiwar movement that is willing to take strategic risks.

# Big Oil Profits from Turmoil

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THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS DRIVING UP THE PRICE OF OIL

BY A.K. GUPTA

With gas prices breaking the \$3 barrier, it seems that the oil age is coming to an end.

The notion of "peak oil," — that geological constraints will force a decline in crude oil production — is the apocalyptic flavor of the moment. Any number of web-sites, books, organizations and discussion groups warn that the post-carbon age is nearly upon us, with everything from industrial agriculture and plastics to pharmaceuticals and the car industry in danger of vanishing.

While peak oil is a sexy theory, it's not valid. An analysis by Cambridge Energy Research Associates of existing oil reserves and future projects predicts increasing production for at least the next two decades. Peak oil is also a dangerous distraction because it shifts the discussion away from political and economic actors — Big Oil, Wall Street and the White House — that bear most of the responsibility for rising oil and gas prices.

Evidence can be seen in the oil market. While government data from this April shows crude oil supplies are 6 percent above the levels from a year ago, oil is about 50 percent more expensive at a whopping \$75 a barrel.

The "terror premium" is one of the main causes of rising crude oil prices, and industry analysts estimate that it's added about \$15-20 to the price of a barrel — so far.

The terror premium refers to White House saber-rattling against Iran. Oil markets fear loss of Iran's 4 million barrels

daily production or a retaliatory attack that could block the critical oil route through the Straits of Hormuz.

Iran is the third major oil producer threatened by the Bush administration. In the case of Iraq, the war, a bungled reconstruction and the insurgency have reduced its oil exports by some 700,000 barrels a day. Venezuela lost about 900,000 barrels a day in productive capacity after the U.S. backed an oil sector strike in 2002-03. Separately, political unrest in Nigeria has caused 500,000 barrels a day to go offline. That's about 2 million barrels a day lost.

Qatar Oil Minister Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiah, observed on April 2: "We are doing all we can to meet demand but prices are rising because of Iran, Nigeria and Iraq."

Increasing demand from the United States and China is also pushing up prices. China's appetite is growing much faster, but its plate is much smaller. We consume about 21 million barrels a day, while China is a distant second at 6.5 million barrels.

Our increased demand stems from ever-more massive vehicles. Increasing fuel standards and encouraging conservation would reduce demand — and oil company profits — which is why Bush prefers to talk of a "hydrogen economy" that may never exist.

Oil companies are also to blame. After oil prices crashed to \$10 a barrel in 1998 following the East Asia currency crisis, exploration dried up.

It takes up to 10 years for mega-projects to come online. So supply constraints now are partly due to the lack of drilling and

exploration from earlier. But some oil traders say outright that Big Oil deliberately cut exploration so as to reduce supplies and drive up profits.

The result is extremely tight supplies. Oil producers are pumping 85 million barrels a day, with all but 1 million barrels a day being consumed. This compares to an excess of about 6 million barrels a day in 2002.

Economic factors include the drop in the value of the dollar, which has fallen by some 50 percent against the Euro since 2001. Back then, OPEC's target price for a barrel was around \$25. So to make up for declining dollar, the main currency for trading on the oil markets, producers need the price to rise by \$12 to \$15 a barrel.

Explosive growth in speculative interest in oil futures, mainly from hedge funds and pension funds, has also driven oil prices up by \$10 to \$15 a barrel.

James Burkhardt, director of oil market analysis at Cambridge Energy Research Associates, explained to the *New York Times* in August 2004, "Speculators don't set the price, but they intensify a price movement in either direction..."

The *Times* recounted one speculative frenzy in May 2004: "When low inventories and news of violent attacks on oil executives and facilities in Saudi Arabia drove oil futures up, speculators piled on, according to market analysts. Their buying forced crude prices up even higher, attracting yet more investors betting on a continued rise, and so on in a classic spiral."

Qatar's Al-Attiah also noted that "more than one million barrels a day are going into inventories," further crimp-

ing supplies. In response to growing consumer anger over high gas prices, Bush suspended deposits of crude oil into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Yet this will do little to affect prices at the pump.

While crude supplies are high, gasoline inventories are low. Big oil has manipulated the U.S. refinery market to ensure tight gasoline supplies.

A *New York Times* article from June 15, 2001, quoted a document from Chevron written in November 1995 that spelled out the strategy: "If the U.S. petroleum industry doesn't reduce its refining capacity, it will never see any substantial increase in refinery profits."

A study by the Consumer Federation from October 2003 noted that in the last 15 years about 75 refineries have closed. Gasoline stocks have declined from 10 days above minimum operating needs in the early 1980s to just two days in 2003. All it takes is one accident at a refinery to send the price of gasoline shooting up.

For the oil companies and producing countries, it's the best of both worlds: high demand and high prices. ExxonMobil raked in a phenomenal \$36.1 billion profit in 2005.

The high prices haven't caused an economic downturn so far because Americans spend a smaller part of their budget on gas than during the 1970s. In addition, around 80 percent of purchases at the pump are now made by credit card, so the increased costs just get cycled into the massive debt serviced by most households.

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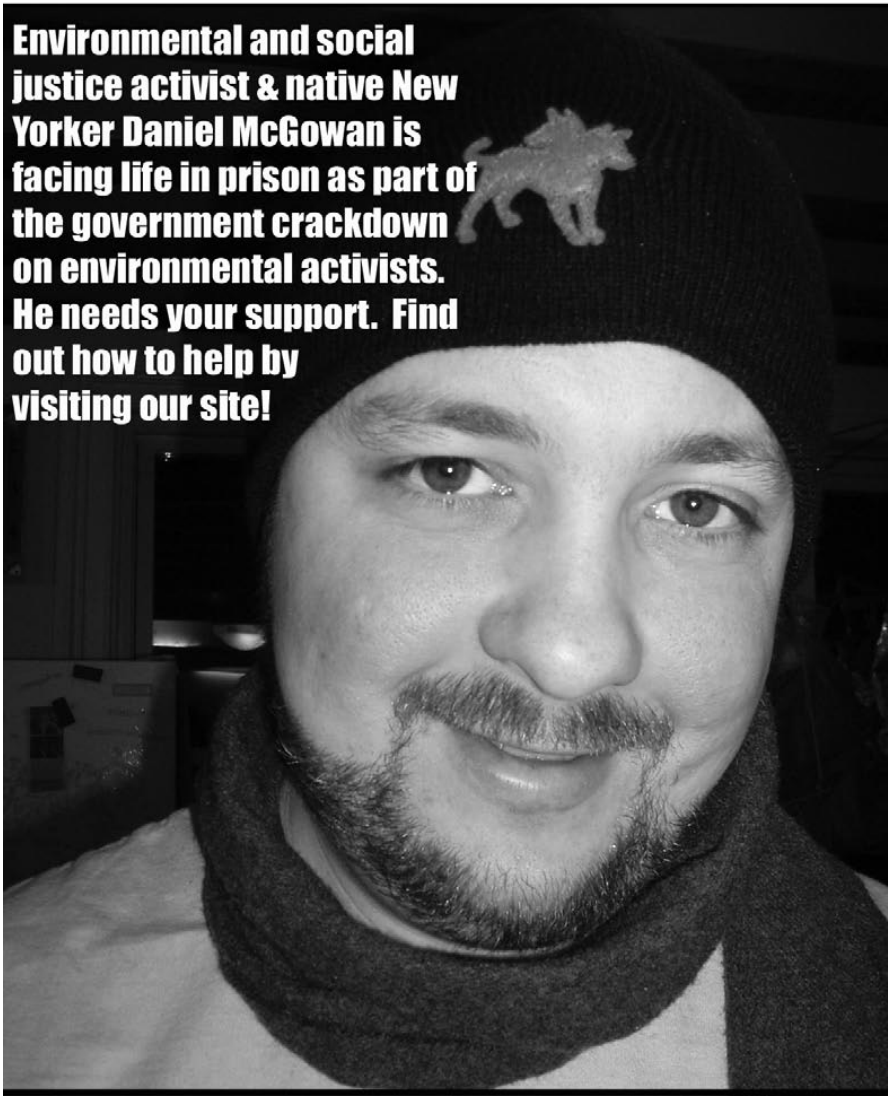
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India

# Fighting for a Forest

WOMEN OF BATKA BEHRA DEFEND THEIR WAY OF LIFE



**WOOD YOU LEAVE US ALONE?** Bindia Bai of Batka Behra village stands in front of a section of downed *Sal* trees. Resistance to government-sponsored clear-cutting is growing in northern India. PHOTO: ALEX STONEHILL

BY SARAH STUTEVILLE

CHHATTISGARH, India—"Zindabad!" shouts Bindia Bai, pressing her hands together in greeting as she sits down on the hard-packed mud floor to meet with fellow village women in the sunny courtyard of her home. This revolutionary rallying cry meaning "victory" echoes throughout Batka Behra village and has been spreading across the remote tribal hills of Chhattisgarh state in recent months. A new movement challenging government corruption and resource cooption is building among these ancient people.

Bindia and other indigenous people in the tribal region of Koriya live largely in isolation from mainstream Indian society, and survive through hunting and gathering from the surrounding forests supplemented by small-scale farming. Commonly referred to as "the tribals," they have long been considered backwards by outsiders. Their society's communal nature and isolation have made them ready targets for exploitation.

Pervasive corruption has compromised the enforcement of constitutional laws meant to ensure food security and protection from land displacement for India's tribals. Most have seen their land and resources dwindle in recent generations.

"When we were children these forests were filled with bamboo plants which we used for weaving and tools," says Bindia, "but then the people from Birla Corporation [an Indian paper manufacturer] came and now there is no bamboo."

The Forest Development Corporation (FDC) — a for-profit department of the Indian government — arrived three months ago with intentions of clearing the land of old growth *Sal* trees in favor of a lucrative teak plantation. But Bindia and fellow Batka Behra women were determined that the *Sal* trees would not vanish as the bamboo had.

Armed only with their chant of "*Nari Shakti, Zindabad!*" (Women's Power, Victory!), more than 100 women marched into the forest to confront the loggers. Recognizing that they were outnumbered, the loggers relinquished their tools to the angry women and fled. Those successfully confiscated tools remain locked away in the house of the village head. To date logging has not resumed.

The fight for the *Sal* forest is not the first political undertaking of Batka Behra's women. They started organizing two years ago to

ensure that a government doctor would visit their village more often. They went on to protest price gouging by distributors of government-subsidized rice, and then to advocate a more nutritious lunch menu at the local government school. But it is the fight for the forest that will ultimately determine the fate of their lives and livelihoods.

"We get everything that we need to survive from the forest," explains Bindia, "leaves and seeds and food and firewood. If the government cuts these trees and replants teak we won't be able to get what we need to live."

This crucial battle for control over their resources has galvanized many in the area, encouraging Koriyans from diverse tribes to work together. The esteem in which the Batka Behra women are held is evident when they inspire an impromptu community meeting at the site of an FDC clearcut, where tribal villagers face off with security guards posted to protect the fallow timber stacked along the roadside.

"The government will listen and hear them out," says one FDC guard in response to the passionate shouting coming from the small knot of angry villagers that has gathered around him. "This is what the majority of people are saying and so I'm liking it."

But gaining the sympathy of the higher level officials behind the logging won't be so easy. The financial motivations for clearing the forest can far outweigh any desire to protect the tribal way of life. The *Sal* trees that are being cut to make way for the plantation can fetch up to 10,000 rupees (about \$250) each. The Maoist Naxalite insurgency in the area gives the government a reason to establish a forest presence and an excuse to suppress any resistance to such logging projects.

Despite these barriers, the women of Batka Behra remain determined to save the forest and have called a gathering of Koriyan communities and preservationists to meet with government representatives in an effort to permanently halt the logging. Even if these legal channels fail, the women of Batka Behra maintain that they will use any means necessary to protect their trees.

"First, when the men came to take the bamboo, we were even afraid of the motorcycles they rode in on and we ran away," says Bindia, emphasizing how the bitterness of that past wrong fuels the current struggle. "Now we know we cannot afford to be afraid."

*This article was produced by the Common Language Project (commonlanguageproject.net).*



Clockwise from left: **CELEBRATION** filled the streets when the king announced that he was restoring the parliament; **GUERRILLAS** of the People's Liberation Army control 80% of Nepal; **PRO-DEMOCRACY** protests including the urban middle classes; **PRACHANDA**, or the "fierce one;" **RED MILITIA** **WOMEN** are controversial in South Asia; **STREET JUSTICE** is delivered to a police commander in Katmandu; **GENERAL STRIKE** shut down all commerce for three weeks; **CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY** is the main demand of protesters skeptical of the last parliament's failure to affect substantial change for the impoverished rural majority.

# After Years of Insurgency, Nepal Erupts

BY JED BRANDT

In a dramatic turn of events, Nepal's Maoist-led People's Liberation Army lifted a blockade of the capital of Katmandu and announced a unilateral three-month cease-fire after politicians in the newly restored parliament agreed to elect a constituent assembly that would tackle the status of the country's much-despised monarchy.

According to the *Hindu*, a daily in India, Maoist rebel leader Prachanda warned against any backsliding, however. "I wish to make it clear that if the first meeting of the (restored) parliament does not take a positive decision on the declaration of an unconditional constituent assembly, we will be compelled to reimpose the blockade."

The move came after King Gyanendra restored on April 24 the very same parliament he dissolved four years ago in a last-ditch effort to save his regime. Gyanendra had been isolated after a 19-day general strike that saw millions of Nepalese demand his ouster and the establishment of an assembly.

The king's retreat came the evening after one million protesters, fortified by throngs from the countryside, pushed past Katmandu's city limits and braved shoot-on-sight curfews, tear gas and mass arrests that had already left hospitals overflowing with thousands injured and at least 19 killed.

Amid popular jubilation, leaders of the "Seven Party Alliance," independent of a loose pact with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), chose the infirmed octogenarian G.P. Koirala of the centrist Congress Party for his fifth stint as Prime Minister.

It was just 14 months ago that the king assumed emergency powers and established a brutal dictatorship in response to the Maoist-

led "People's War" that had established effective control over 80 percent of Nepal's Himalayan countryside.

The terror previously reserved for the Maoists was unleashed on the middle classes and their political representatives in the Seven Party Alliance. Thousands were arrested, tortured, raped and disappeared by the Royal Nepal Army. Freedom of assembly and the press were completely suppressed. The king's foreign sponsors, the United States, Britain and India, which views Nepal as part of its regional sphere of influence, were forced to distance themselves from the regime they had armed and trained. The Hindu monarch, who claimed to be the living incarnation of the god Vishnu, withdrew into his palace while his army ran amok.

## TOWARDS DEMOCRACY, UNITY AGAINST THE KING

With Gyanendra regarded by the vast majority of the population as illegitimate, the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance announced an alliance on Nov. 21, 2005, despite years of often lethal conflict. The Seven Party Alliance was party to the government's counterinsurgency campaign, and the Maoists targeted the parties' officials in kind.

The parties and the Maoists united behind a "12-point agreement" demanding a democratic constituent assembly to draft a new constitution and decide the monarchy's fate.

The Maoists called a ceasefire and requested peace negotiations aimed at the king's abdication. Gyanendra refused, and issued a call at the start of 2006 for municipal elections, which were boycotted by every party and flopped.

The Maoists went on the offensive militarily, scoring successive victories against the army, which was increasingly confined to the barracks.

In February and March, Prachanda and the unorthodox leader of the Maoists' popular organizations, Baburam Bhattarai gave a series of interviews to the international press in which they pledged their respect for democracy and called for a "final blow" against the monarchy. This was the first time Prachanda appeared in public since the launch of the people's war in 1996.

The Seven Party Alliance took responsibil-



ity for organizing the urban protests, which spread spontaneously. Schools were shut down, virtually all commerce stopped and the pro-democracy movement became the only order of the day. Young people dominated the bloody protests, and politicians kept a low profile.

For their part, the Maoists launched a renewed military offensive, attacking targets around the country, while sparing the capital. As the protest began, an army helicopter was downed by ground fire for the first time.

Revolution, a Chicago-based paper published by the Revolutionary Communist Party, reported, "On April 6, the PLA took over Malangwa, the district headquarters of Sarlahi [and the main trade link with India]. The action left dozens of security personnel dead, and dozens injured. Some 125 prisoners, most of them political, were released from the prison."

By the denouement of the April protests, when it became clear the king had no domestic support outside the military, the U.S. State Department called for the king to step into a "ceremonial role," restore the urban political class to power and, it hoped, forestall an insurrection that would upend the feudal order and leave the Maoists with a clear path into the capital. The State Department is hoping the Seven Party Alliance will save the state from the rising revolution and has offered aid.

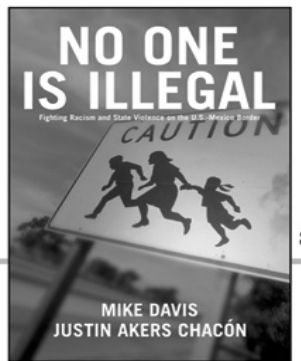
## SACRIFICE THE KING TO SAVE THE STATE

The king still stands in control of the military. The Maoists initially denounced the Alliance's acceptance of the king's terms as a "historic blunder," only calling off their blockade on the promise of an immediate constituent assembly and that they would no longer be designated as a terrorist group, according to local media.

Koirala was set to be sworn in as prime minister on April 28, but he is reported to be too sick to leave his bed. Statues of the king are being ripped down throughout the country, with celebration and anxiety in equal measure.

As *The Independent* goes to press, the Maoists have announced a mass rally in the heart of Katmandu while the parliament they are not part of meets.

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Haymarket Books has published an annotated version of one of history's most notable political tracts, *The Communist Manifesto*.

Edited by Phil Gasper, Haymarket's release is helpful for first-time readers of *The Manifesto*, with notes that put the document in modern language and context. Haymarket's edition contains corrected translations and many appendices, giving context and background to *the Manifesto*.

*The Manifesto*, co-written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, gives a short, sweeping history of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat but is also a call to action. *The Manifesto* was published in 1848 and since then, Marx's ideas have given birth to revolutions and counter-revolutions, and seen the abyss of Stalinism and countless sectarian splits. But the Manifesto's analysis and projection of capital's development into its modern, globalized form is remarkably prescient. The Iraq War makes sense when viewed through a Marxist perspective, as capital ever needs new markets and access to resources, including oil.

Unabashed commies, Marx and Engels distinguished themselves from socialists and other reformers through their commitment to the overthrow of capitalism, destruction of private property and rule by the working class. The piece is as radical now as when it was written, though many critics have declared Marxism dead and irrelevant. As long as there is capitalism, there will be communism.

—BENNETT BAUMER

# The Age of Unreason

THE END OF FAITH  
SAM HARRIS  
W. W. NORTON; REPRINT EDITION  
(OCTOBER 10, 2005)

An onslaught of apocalyptic violence, fueled by jingoism, right-wing evangelical ideologues, and Islamofascists, has motivated writers like Sam Harris to brazenly "close the door [on] a certain style of irrationality," namely religious fanaticism. In his book, *The End of Faith*, Harris argues, "Intolerance is intrinsic to every creed." Accordingly, "perfect faith" (like that espoused by a suicide bomber) is inhospitable to any rational society. Good point, especially when Harris acknowledges that "the central tenet of every religious tradition is that all others are mere repositories of error."

Thus, if humanity neglects to recognize (or at least assess) the inherent lunacy of such fundamentalists' tenets, then intoxicating myths will continue to violently "unmake our world." *The End of Faith* is principally concerned with revealing how our over reliance on faith crucifies reason and that "our most cherished beliefs" lead "us to kill one another."

What troubles Harris the most is not the religious fundamentalists hell-bent on achiev-

MIXED SIGNALS, A COUNTER-RECRUITMENT  
TOOL IN COMIC BOOK FORM  
BY SABRINA JONES



# COMIX AGAINST THE WAR

Let's start out by saying this is the best weapon in the visual arsenal of the struggle against the economic conscription into the military of young men and women sent off to the Middle East. It packs a visual wallop, it is hugely attractive, and permission is readily granted for noncommercial use. You forget for a moment, when looking at its political value, that it is a real work of art. Then you find yourself looking at the flowing lines, and you remember that serious art, important art, can sometimes be the best political convincer.

Antiwar, anti-draft cartooning goes a long way back and has never been without risk. A series of famous *Masses* magazine drawings published between 1916 and 1918 got the magazine suppressed and its editors and artists put on trial. Wobbly labor organizer Joe Hill had, of course, been railroaded into a murder conviction and executed in Salt Lake City a few years earlier. The prevalence of youth culture provided a measure of protection for the anti-draft, anti-war artists of the 1960s and 1970s. And throughout this history, there's never been a comic book solely devoted to opposing conscription or enlistment.

Into this outlaw history comes the extraordinary talent of Sabrina Jones. A native Philadelphian, Jones studied art at Pratt Institute and illustration at the School of Visual Arts. Matisse, Van Gogh and Picasso caught her attention, because their use of motion literally swept aside the staidness of earlier painting styles. Figurative painting was also making a comeback between the 1960s and 1980s, after a spell of Abstract Expressionism (Henry Luce called it "Free Enterprise Art") dominated the Cold War galleries.

Then something really interesting happened to political art: The combination of the contemporary social movements, underground comix and the feminist movement, made this painter, to her surprise, into a cartoonist.

Jones ran into the then-fledgling *World War 3 Illustrated* crowd, with talented hotheads like Seth Tobocman and Peter Kuper setting the pace, but also opening up pages to new talent. She took the plunge and never looked back, editing as well

as writing/drawing for *World War 3*, the patient, steady work of keeping the first sustained gallery of radical comic art across the decades and across social issues from gentrification to militarization, abortion rights to political repression.

There's another side to Jones, the day-worker and ardent unionist of United Scenic Artists Local 829, laborers in theater, film and TV set-designs. And yet another, the editor of the *Girllink* anthology of women's autobiographical comics, not to mention her freelance work in both illustration and comics for publications ranging from the *New York Times* to *Legal Action Comics*.

The Jones of *Mixed Signals* seems to me the political genius of the *World War 3* crowd boiled down into a burningly clear narrative. Jones has put aside self-conscious artistic flourishes, but not the flow of the line that owes its sources to the artistic breakthroughs of a century ago, from Europe to Greenwich Village.

Her protagonist of the first story, Josh of "Josh Signs Up," is a blue-collar kid without a future that he can grasp; the military looks good for a moment, because he convinces himself, after a meeting with a friendly-appearing recruiter, that he can recapture pride in himself and from his family. They lie to him about the choices he's going to have when he signs up, and Jones spells out over several pages just what he's in for.

Her second story, "Tony's American Dream," is that of an immigrant kid who needs help for college tuition. The last, "Gloria: an Attack of Conscience," is of an African-American in Iraq, learning the tough lessons about an inhuman system, firsthand.

There's more here, a dozen lessons on each page, spelled out so clearly that anyone who can read will get the message. Get some of these comics, find a way to put them in the hands of the young men and women who need them. This art marks the way forward.

—PAUL BUHLE

Paul Buhle has written or edited 27 books on the history of radicalism.

ing Armageddon, but that society often takes such fanatics seriously. He notes, "Religion is sheltered from criticism in every corner of our culture." But why are we so hesitant to question religious beliefs when we can so easily question those regarding political and even personal values? As *The End of Faith* illustrates, it is time for society to recognize that religiously inspired convictions often create disastrous results when taken too far, such as when stem cell research is banned.

The most troubling portion of Harris's argument is his discussions of torture. Thankfully, Harris doesn't justify torture; he argues that it is hypocritical for society to disparage torture in one breath and tolerate "collateral damage" the next. After all, Harris asks, "What is 'col-

lateral damage' but the inadvertent torture of innocent men, women, and children?"

Harris does not seek to persecute religious people. He is, however, critical of the hate-filled violence and utter absurdity of organized religion, which prevents humanity from achieving greater personal awareness. This argument is especially significant when considering the unfortunate number of Americans who are still unable to recognize the importance of the separation of church and state. Harris claims, "We are allowing unreason and otherworldliness to govern our affairs." His hope is for this to change and for humanity to finally be rid of the outdated myths that continue to hurt us all.

Amen to that.

—NICHOLAS ALLANACH

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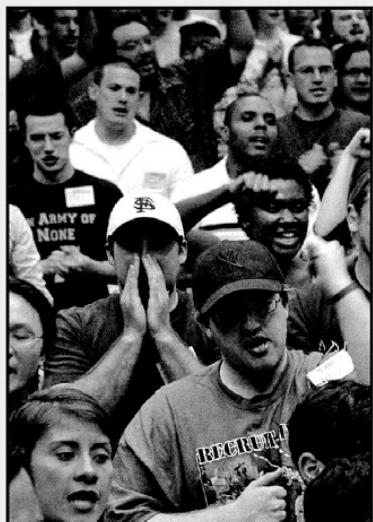
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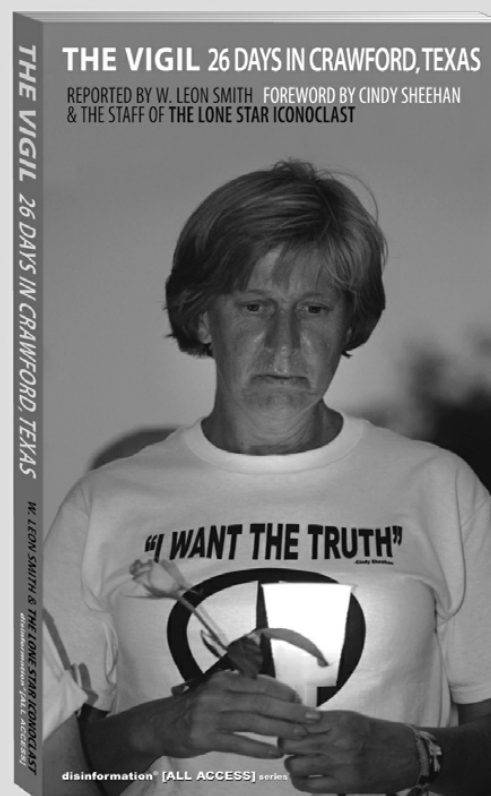
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## film

# Fallujah Speaks

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"The enemy has got a face. He's called Satan. He's in Fallujah. And we're going to destroy him."

—Lt. Col. Gary Brandl

Several days after Bush declared victory in the 2004 presidential elections, more than 10,000 U.S. troops launched an assault on the Iraqi city of Fallujah. The assault killed thousands, displaced almost all of the city's 300,000 residents and left. The gripping 30-minute documentary, *Fallujah*, on display in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, shows U.S. atrocities committed in the assault. The film got rave reviews from several publications, including the *Times* of London, which stated that *Fallujah* "is a sobering indictment of global democracy at gunpoint, and on its own makes the Biennial essential viewing."

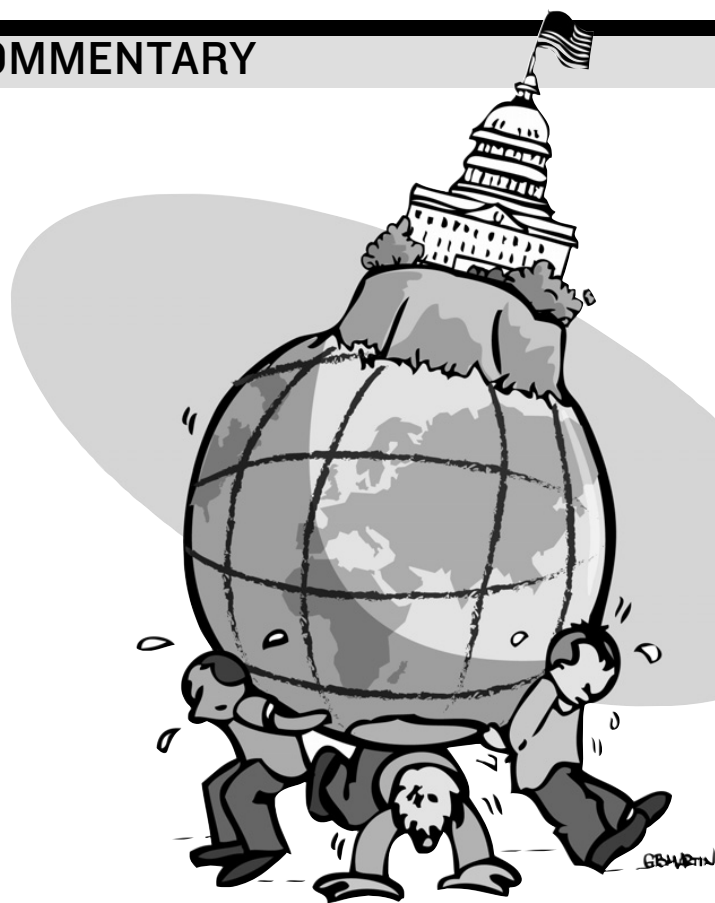
*Fallujah* begins with a chronicle of events leading up to the November 2004 assault: the April 2003 massacre by the United States of 15 Fallujans protesting the U.S. military's takeover of a local school; four Blackwater mercenaries killed in March 2004; the April 2004 attack that failed to "secure" the city. Then, through moving firsthand accounts and cinema verité, the film provides a ground-level view of the effects of the November assault on the families who were unable to flee the city. Stories and images of maimed and injured children, as well as destroyed mosques, schools, and hospitals glaringly contradict Pentagon claims that there were no more civilians in Fallujah when the attack began.

*Fallujah* is a collaborative production: the peace group Code Pink commissioned Iraqi filmmaker Hamudi Jasim to send a team of videographers and investigative journalists to Fallujah to record the destruction and death inflicted by the U.S.-led assault. Jasim also interviewed dozens of the estimated 250,000 thousand Fallujah residents who fled, many of them landing in refugee camps on the outskirts of Fallujah and Baghdad. Using footage obtained from Code Pink and other sources, producers Brandon Jourdan and Jacquie Soohen edited a comprehensive story about what happened there.

The film is most compelling when people who suffered through the tragedy describe in their own words what they lived through. *Fallujah* includes stories of residents unable to obtain medical care for their injured children because aid personnel were barred entrance to the city, as well as accounts of people living in makeshift refugee camps lacking sufficient water, food and shelter.

"We have been here for three months," says one refugee in the film, a 65-year-old woman who sits beside a tent holding an

## COMMENTARY



# The American Exception

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

I left the lights on again. I often do but a scene this morning in the travel show "Globe Trekker" forced me to question why. The British host Ian was stranded in the dark on a dirt road in Mozambique. The night was held back by the weak glow of the camera. Ian mockingly whispered through a strained smile, "It's very dangerous out here."

I watched the TV, blackened by the Mozambique night, in a brightly lit room. The light exposed my daily wastefulness — my long hot shower, the plastic bottles piled in the trash, the food left uneaten. I don't think about anything ever running out.

The privilege to waste is my inheritance as a member of the City on a Hill, the classic image of American Exceptionalism that began with the English Puritans. They believed we were destined to be a model of purity leading humanity. Today their religious morality is overtaken by consumer morality where we are purified of want and each desire is met with a product that answers it.

We are the model of humanity, like mannequins living inside a display, needing to be seen by the world and yet be separated from it. A sign of that separation is we can enjoy lives of infinite desire on a planet of finite resources. But to sustain our consumer morality we must expand our empire and seize the labor and fuel of the globe. American Exceptionalism becomes imperialism that justifies itself with guilt. We will save the world from itself.

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see farther into the future." Her statement is the very core of American ideology. The world is blind and we are burdened by the vision of what must be, of the U.S. as an eternal force beyond the reach of time.

The Right's use of American Exceptionalism is well known but it's a tradition of the Left as well. The war is a disaster but like many people, I wonder if we should leave now or later. A recent poll says over 70 percent of Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq want U.S. troops to leave immediately but I struggle with guilt, with my reluctance to give up American Exceptionalism.

Democrats haven't given up on it. They invoke

the rhetoric of responsibility to demand we wait until Iraq stabilizes before leaving. Former presidential nominee Sen. John Kerry and Rep. John Murtha, a Vietnam War vet, offer us "strategic redeployment" a pull back but not a pulling out. The Democrats have found their voice and it is an echo of the past.

If we leave, it's not destruction of Iraq that terrifies us but the reality of our failure, of the limits to our exceptionalism. If our imperialism fails the "American way of life" it protects ends and we can no longer consume endlessly, we return to the finite world of limited resources the rest of the world lives in.

When Colin Powell warned Bush on Iraq, "If you break it you own it," he tried to give the president a sense of responsibility. Now his warning has become the administration's excuse for staying. We own Iraq and are responsible for its future. If anything, history shows us no nation can own another but Imperial guilt is useful as the last guise of power.

We are told if we leave blood will soak the streets red. The civil war will intensify and tear Iraq apart as the rivalries between Shiite and Sunni, Arab and Kurd are settled with the flash of gunshot and the swing of a blade. Women will continue to be locked inside homes and veils.

If we leave and the blood runs, Iraq will fade as the media loses interest. It's happened before. We lost interest in the 300,000 Iraqis we've killed since the war began. Clinton aside, we don't "feel your pain." We are numb to the violence done in our name. Iraq's pain will be forgotten as was the suffering inflicted upon the Vietnamese.

The pain we will acknowledge is the end of American Exceptionalism and the beginning of a history we cannot create or control.

Yet all of this is an empty discussion. The decision to stay or leave is one we will never make. We may get kicked out, but we won't leave even if Democrats win the Congress in 2006 and the White House in 2008.

We are protecting more than oil; we are guarding our identity as the "indispensable nation" as the ideal that guides humanity. We won't leave because we are addicted to power and I am addicted to my privilege and for decades to come in the City on the Hill, the lights will be on at night.

infant. "Our children are sick, our men are gone, killed. Our country is destroyed. We are homeless now. They tell us to go back to Fallujah, now, but what Fallujah do we go back to? Our belongings were stolen and the

houses were leveled... and the Americans are still there."

—DAVID MEIERAN

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# Bad Dreamz

AMERICAN DREAMZ  
DIRECTED BY PAUL WEITZ

Based on the evidence of the last couple months, American filmmakers have developed a finely tuned ear for bad satire. Add *American Dreamz* to a list including *CSA: The Confederate States of America* and *Thank You for Smoking*, not to mention countless others I have deftly managed to avoid. While each of these films fail in their own way, they all share a consistently soft-headed imprecision, a lackadaisical approach to their targets that undercuts the unique force of satire as a persuasive tool. Worse than this, a poorly articulated satire like *American Dreamz* can begin to play like loving parody, thus making one unintentionally sympathetic to its subjects. To be blunt: I'll never forgive this movie for making both Dubya and Kelly Clarkson seem lovable.

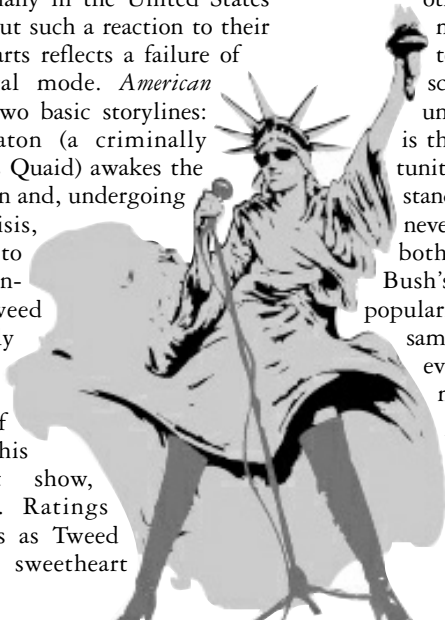
Of course, to many in the United States they are lovable, but such a reaction to their fictional counterparts reflects a failure of the film's satirical mode. *American Dreamz* parallels two basic storylines: President Joe Staton (a criminally underused Dennis Quaid) awakes the day after re-election and, undergoing a vague moral crisis, suddenly desires to read a paper; meanwhile Martin Tweed (Hugh Grant, badly aping Simon Cowell) searches for a new group of contestants for his top-rated talent show, *American Dreamz*. Ratings drive both stories as Tweed pits calculating sweetheart

Sally Kendoo (Mandy Moore) against show-tune-loving, rejected Iraqi terrorist Omer (Sam Golzari) while the Staton's handlers (including a Rove-esque Willem Dafoe) try to resolve a public relations nightmare by having the commander-in-chief guest judge the *American Dreamz* finale.

The sitcom-plot contrivance of all this might have worked if only writer-director Paul Weitz had drawn his characters with skill or care. It's the tone-deaf flipside to Weitz's own *In Good Company*. Whereas that film's precise characterizations and melancholic charm made its simplistic points about age and modern work palatable, this film's take on reality TV culture and our horrific foreign policy never gets fleshed out with believable human beings. Everyone's an archetype and only Kendoo, whose Machiavellian media savvy can't jade her radiance, approaches something like a complex person.

*American Dreamz* has only two worthwhile scenes, both conversations between Kendoo and Tweed, who develop a common ground of respect, admiration and attraction that transcends their otherwise underdeveloped characters (they'd be perfect for a soulless *Lost In Translation* remake). Golzari's Omer, Chris Klein's exploited soldier boyfriend and all the other characters come across as merely insulting, reflecting a tone of Democratic Party condescension that plagues the whole undertaking. And Quaid's Staton is the film's biggest wasted opportunity: He is basically a cardboard stand-in for Bush, his moral crisis never gels, and the film doesn't even bother to explore the notion that Bush's ignorance is central to his popularity. For a better version of this same idea, rent Warren Beatty's ever-relevant *Bulworth*, still the model for messy and provocative political satire. But if you do see the sluggish, idiotic *American Dreamz*, listen closely for the sound of Jonathan Swift rolling over in his grave once again.

—CHARLIE BASS



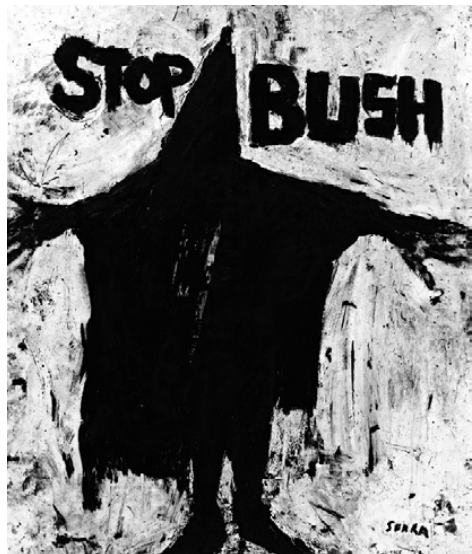
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Richard Serra

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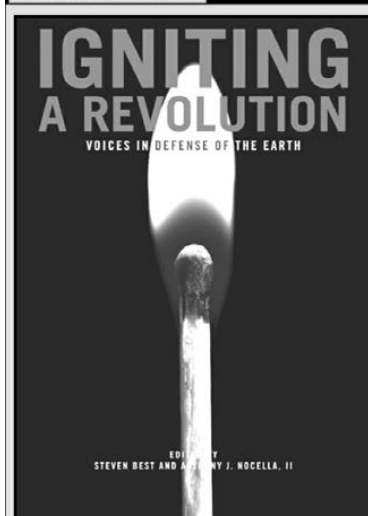
Videos such as *Dance of Death*, *Falluja*, and *Empire and Oil* by Deep Dish TV are screened against a background of elements from Picasso's "Guernica" and newspaper stock market tables.

These and others are sad to contemplate. It is even more disturbing to proceed to the top floor of the museum where paintings and sculpture from early 20th century realism to mid-century abstraction are on exhibit and where one sees by contrast the vitality and possibilities then thought to be embodied in them.

I find it hard to reconcile myself to what a pity all of this is. In fact, I can't.

—DONALD PANETH

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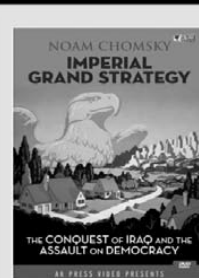
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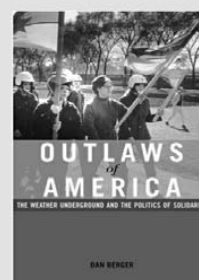
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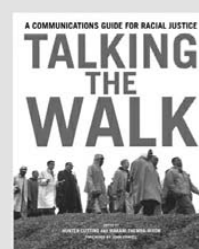


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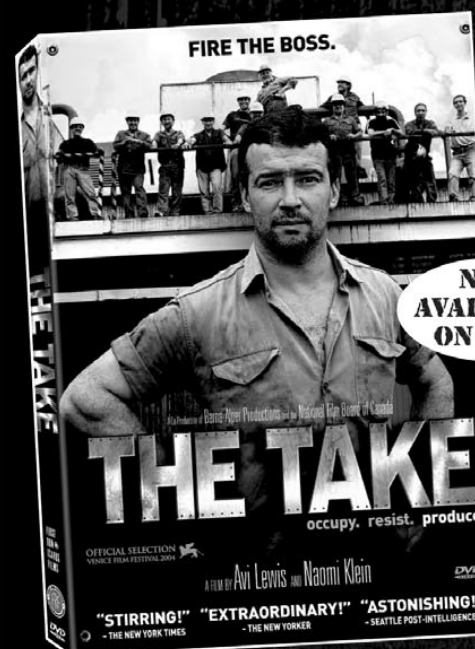
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# Rebel Soldiers

SIR! NO SIR!

DIRECTED BY DAVID ZEIGER  
DISPLACED FILMS, 2005

One of the Vietnam War's most enduring legacies is the widespread belief that protesters betrayed and later mistreated the soldiers who fought in that conflict. The reality – that GIs were at the forefront of the anti-war movement by 1970 and were disobeying their commanders en masse – is strikingly different as David Zeiger's eye-opening new documentary *Sir! No Sir!* makes clear.

Combining Vietnam-era footage and present-day interviews with former GI resisters now in their 50s and 60s, *Sir! No Sir!* brings back to life a multi-racial, predominantly working-class movement that erupted spontaneously, rocked the U.S. political and military establishment and then disappeared within a few short years. The movie takes its audience into the barracks and the stockades, the court-martial hearings, the press conferences, protests, underground GI papers and GI coffeehouses, the battlefield carnage and the veterans hospitals and, most importantly, the consciences of the soldiers who decided they would no longer kill for their government.

For many soldiers, the war simply becomes a battle to save their own humanity. One of the most moving moments in the film is the footage of singer Rita Martinson performing "Soldier, We Love You" – a tender salute to

GIs who rebel against their commanders – in front of thousands of rapt service members at a show in the Philippines.

One shortcoming of the movie, however, is that it implies that everyone who was opposed to the military brass became an idealistic activist. Crime and substance abuse were other responses to being stuck in Vietnam.

While most of the people interviewed for the film are little known, one familiar face pops up. Jane Fonda is seen performing to wild applause in front of thousands of GIs at F.T.A. ("Fuck the Army") shows held in towns near military bases in 1971-72. Far from being the traitorous vixen of right-wing demonology, "Hanoi Jane" appears as a passionate advocate for the vast majority of GIs who wanted the war to end. This and many other scenes in the movie raise a perplexing question: why did this movement disappear so completely from the popular memory to be replaced by the endlessly repeated myth of a "noble cause" betrayed by Hollywood starlets and elitist student protesters? *Sir! No Sir!* deals with this only in passing. The implications are enormous as it would have been more difficult to launch the Reagan-era military buildup much less the Iraq War if this country hadn't insisted on learning all the wrong lessons from the Vietnam War.

The film also provokes another important question: Could the military's chain of command break down again, this time in Iraq?

Today's professional, all-volunteer force is better-paid, better-trained and more cohesive than the conscript force that disintegrated 35 years ago. Nonetheless, Zeiger's film is a timely reminder that rebellion can take root in even the most unlikely circumstances.

—JOHN TARLETON



*Sir! No Sir!* will play in New York until early May at the IFC Center at 6th Ave. and 3rd St. For more, see [sirnosir.com](http://sirnosir.com).

## WHAT EVERY PERSON SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WAR

CHRIS HEDGES  
FREE PRESS – 2003

# War Explained in 437 Questions

War in the end is always about betrayal. Betrayal of the young by the old, of soldiers by politicians and idealists by cynics," Chris Hedges told graduates and their parents in a May 2003 commencement address he gave at Rockford (IL.) College one month after the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein. For his trouble, the veteran *New York Times* war correspondent was booed off the stage. Three years later, Hedges short Q & A book *What Every Person Should Know About War* deserves a thorough

read now more than ever from anyone thinking of entering the military as well as those who still support the war in Iraq. Hedges, author of the highly acclaimed *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, adopts a dry, dispassionate tone as he guides the reader through every facet of the war-fighting experience. This is a book nearly devoid of adjectives. The facts – alternately mundane and horrible – speak for themselves.

—JOHN TARLETON



MINNEAPOLIS GENERAL STRIKE, 1934

# SUBTERRANEAN FIRE

A HISTORY OF WORKING CLASS RADICALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

SHARON SMITH

Author of *Women and Socialism* as well as many articles on women's liberation and the U.S. working class. Her writings appear regularly in *Socialist Worker* newspaper and the *International Socialist Review*.

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ABOUT *SUBTERRANEAN FIRE*  
Available from Haymarket Books

Workers in the United States have a rich tradition of fighting back and achieving gains previously thought unthinkable, from the weekend, to health care, to the right to even form a union.

But in 2005, the number of workers organized in unions reached a 100-year low in the public and private sectors and real wages for most workers have stagnated or declined since the 1970s.

Smith shows how a return to the fighting traditions of US labor history, with their emphasis on rank-and-file strategies for change, can turn around the labor movement.

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# EVIL TWIN BOOKING AGENCY

entertainment for people who think

We help you bring performers, speakers, workshops & films to your town..



Evil Twin Booking workers collective helps to bring socially conscious independent films and performance artists to both small towns and large cities. We believe that art and information are for the people, and not only for the privileged. Folks get in touch with us when they want to bring any of the presentations on our roster to their town. We help them figure out how to host an event.

Normally the task of exhibition is a difficult one for an independent mediamaker: Smaller distributors and self-distributed projects are often forced to compete against well funded studios for limited amount of space and time in metropolitan art-house theatres. At Evil Twin Booking we're trying to remedy this problem as many of the projects we deal with are politically oriented and cutting edge and need a little more push. (As suburbanophiles: we root for the underdog.)

After years of touring with the Lost Film Fest and numerous bands, Scott Beibin, Liz Cole and a bunch of friends applied the Do-It-Yourself ethics learned in the punk rock scene to form a collectively run organization that helps bring anti-authoritarian and underground films, performers and speakers to unexpected places.

Evil Twin Booking teaches people how to circumvent the corporate owned media + allow challenging films to be shown in settings such as theaters, universities, warehouses, activist spaces and infoshops, art spaces, cultural gatherings, film festivals, concerts, squats, community centers, rooftops, union halls, street parties, churches, synagogues, mosques, caves, parks, alleyways etc: We also arrange residencies at institutions for the presenters we work with.

Wherever independent and conscious art and media is needed, we can be found.

If you would like to propose a project to us, one can submit a proposal using the online form at [www.eviltwinbooking.org](http://www.eviltwinbooking.org). Currently we are seeking projects representing people of color, women, queer and transgender issues, alternative fuels, sustainable agriculture+permaculture, natural healing and vegan diet.

Thanks! The Evil Twin Booking Collective:  
Liz Cole, Scott Beibin, Danielle Loftus  
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## THE YES MEN (live!) with Andy Bichlbaum + Mike Bonanno

also check out these other presentations:

<p><b>The Corporation</b> w. Mark Achbar &amp; Jennifer Abbott</p>	<p><b>The Weather Underground</b> w/ Bernardine Dohrn, Sam Green, Bill Ayers +</p>	<p><b>Lost Film Fest</b> performance hosted by vj Scott Beibin</p>	<p><b>Why We Fight</b> presented by dir. Eugene Jarecki</p>	<p><b>M1 (Dead Prez)</b> The history of Black Radicalism</p>	<p><b>Beehive Collective</b> multimedia presentation</p>	<p><b>Mouth To Mouth</b> presented by director Alison Murray</p>
<p><b>Boots!</b> Boots Riley (The Coup) An Unorthodox history of Hip Hop:</p>	<p><b>Veg My Ride</b> bio fuels presentation w/ Rob Del Bueno</p>	<p><b>Lanceras</b> Radical Women of South America w/ Actitud Maria Marta</p>	<p><b>Timothy Speed Levitch</b> Live Performances + walking tours</p>	<p><b>The Revolution Will Not Be Televised</b> (film screenings only)</p>	<p><b>Found Magazine</b> multimedia presentation w/ Davy Rothbart</p>	<p><b>Eric Drooker</b> Multimedia Presentation + workshop</p>

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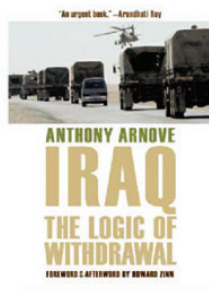
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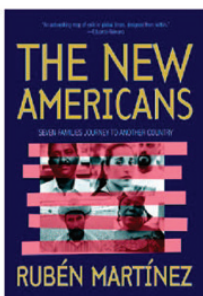


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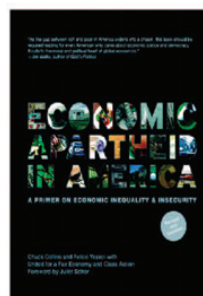


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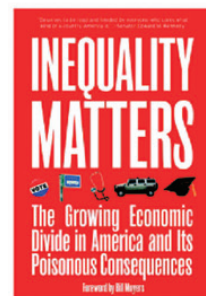
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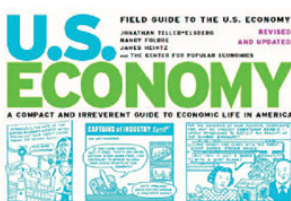


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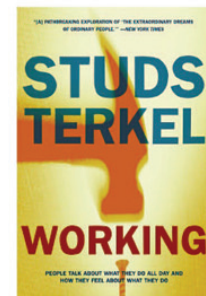
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